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ST BENEDICT

A CHARACTER STUDY

FROM THE PEN OF

RT. REV. ILDEPHONSUS HERWEGEN, O.S.B.

ABBOT OF MARIA LAACH

TRANSLATED BY

DOM PETER NUGENT, O.S.B.

LONDON: SANDS & CO.
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Introduction

THERE is only one historical source for a life of St Benedict — the second book of the *Dialogues* of St Gregory the Great. This biography gives us a collection of narratives, mostly of a miraculous character, which, in the stormy days of the migration of the nations afforded consolation and edification to the faithful. These narratives have all the advantages of St Gregory's art in telling them, but as far as knowledge of the personality of the great Father of Monks is concerned, they are rather a delicately woven veil. St Benedict's world of thought is revealed to us in his written Rule. This must be combined with Gregory's sketch of his life. The Pontiff's Episodes form a background and a frame; they complete and illustrate the picture of the spirit and individuality which manifest themselves in St Benedict's own work.

I have endeavoured to melt the Life and the Rule into one, so as to place before the reader the singular and comprehensive personality of St Benedict. It must be borne in mind, however, that I

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do not intend to write a biography of the Saint, but merely a character sketch. Accordingly I only take from the *Dialogues* those elements that help to bring out his personality. St Gregory's narratives have their own distinctive worth similar to that of the *Fioretti*, which give us a vivid picture of the life and temper of St Francis.

It is not my intention to burden these few pages with critical and literary remarks: I simply let the two sources speak for themselves. At the same time it will not escape the initiated that I have tried to learn from the best who have made a study of the Life and Rule of St Benedict.

I find a particular pleasure in being able to accompany my sketch with the illustrations, which the reader owes to Brother Notker Becker, a member of my own community.

This English translation of the first edition is a legacy of the late Father Peter Nugent of the former Benedictine Abbey, Erdington, near Birmingham.

ABBEY OF MARIA LAACH, RHINELAND,
Feast of the Nativity of Our Lady,
Septem. 8th, 1922.

✠ ILDEFONSUS HERWEGEN, DR.JUR.H.C.,
Abbot.

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The Hermit

AT a short distance from the Salarian military road, which runs from Rome, through the country of the Sabines, to the Adriatic coast, and not far from the boundary-line of Umbria, lies the ancient Nursia—to-day Norcia—the home of St Benedict. Built in a broad, elevated valley of the Apennines, the city sits in a framework of green hills, that form but a foreground to those giant mountains, which in the east and south lift their rocky, sunlit peaks up into the deep blue sky. In this remote mountain region ancestral customs could maintain themselves longer than in the busy plains around Rome. If Cicero could extol the stolid Sabines in general as "severissimi homines," the inhabitants of Nursia were the austerest of all. Nursian endurance—"Nursina durities"—had become a proverb in Rome. Men like Sertorius, the brave but unfortunate champion of liberty in Spain, and Vespasian, one of the noblest of the Cæsars, men both from ancient Nursia—"vetusta Nursia"—embodied in their personalities the old Roman virtues at a time when these virtues no longer found a home in the capital of the world. And yet Sabine

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blood flowed in the veins of the Romans from the very founding of their city and republic.

Like the other small Sabine market-towns, Nursia was an open city and had always preserved its independence. And when the all-conquering power of the city by the Tiber had subjected the whole of Central Italy to its sway, frigid Nursia—"Nursia frigida"—became a confederate of Rome. From that time the mountain city was a Roman municipality.

Nothing contributed more to unite the Italian cities and peoples with the Roman Empire than the favours which Rome bestowed upon the inhabitants of its municipalities. For these it was a matter of the highest importance that the Roman municipal constitution left them the entire management of their own administration. In the early days ruled by kings, later on made a republic, Nursia, at its reception into the Roman state, remained a free community. Republican freedom was in high esteem with the Nursian citizens. Suetonius tells us of the severe punishment inflicted on them by Augustus after his victory over Antony for having erected a monument in honour of their dead in the battle of Mutina (43 B.C.) with the inscription: "They died for liberty."

At the time of the Emperors the citizens were composed of three free estates. From decurions, who may be compared to the Roman senators, the

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citizens selected their chief magistrates. After the decurions came the Augustal knights, and these two privileged classes formed the Roman country nobility in contradistinction to the free citizens or plebeians. The constitution of the city had outlasted the western Roman Empire. The German ruler Odoacer, and after him Theodoric the Great, allowed the old and approved order of rights to continue, and thereby secured the interior peace of Italy. Therefore the Sabine country town was a homestead of old inherited institutions and of the old Roman spirit.

Rome's political power might perish, the city still remained the "caput orbis." A new and higher splendour radiated from her; she had become the head of the Christian world. It was only about the middle of the third century that the light of the Gospel shone in the valley of the Sabine Alps and the hearts of the Nursians were opened to the preaching of St Felician of Foligno. It cost these honest people a hard struggle to give up their ancient gods. The scepticism and frivolity of the cosmopolitan city of the Cæsars had not yet found entrance there. In the mountain regions faith in the gods still lived, but when the people had acknowledged the truth of the glad tidings of Christ, there began to flourish at Nursia a Christian community, whose direction was very soon confided to a bishop of their own.

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Through the fusion of the ancient Roman institutions with the life of the Church the town, as a consequence, at the time of the dominion of the Ostrogoths, united antique culture and the Christian spirit in a social order that was harmonious and well balanced. This living union of antiquity with Christianity was the blessing which Italy was destined to hand on to its German conquerors as the basis of a new period of civilisation, and the man whose name will, for all time, be associated with the transmission of this inheritance of antiquity to the Germans, arose in Nursia.

Towards the close of the fifth century, perhaps about the year 480, St Benedict was born. St Gregory intimates that the boy belonged to a privileged family of senatorial or knightly rank. He was therefore a son of that country nobility which, firmly rooted in the native soil, is accustomed to express most distinctly the characteristic qualities of its race. Unhappily the great Pope in his biography of St Benedict all too often forgets the man in speaking of the Saint. He does not name his parents. One sister only, St Scholastica, is mentioned, and of the rest of the household only his nurse. But as the sanctity of the two children bears witness to the nobility of soul of the parents, so the abiding affection which united the brother and sister, even to the grave, testifies to the warmth of love and happiness that distinguished the family

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in its ancestral hall. Scholastica was a chosen child. The truth and beauty of the story of redemption filled her innocent heart with a confiding love for the Redeemer. At an early age the resolution ripened in her to give herself entirely to Him. Possibly Stephen, who, about the year 495, occupied the Episcopal See of Nursia, consecrated her as a bride of Christ. Then the girl was admitted into the ranks of the divinely espoused virgins who, in the ancient Church, were regarded as the most beautiful ornament of the Christian community. Afterwards, as before, Scholastica likely remained, according to the then general custom, in the home of her parents.

Of Benedict's babyhood we are told nothing. We can have no doubt that his early years were diligently devoted to learning. In the noble Christian families great importance was attached to the careful education of the children, especially of the sons. The schools of antiquity were still in full activity, and we may suppose that St Benedict received instruction in elementary studies and in the various branches of classical learning in those of Nursia. The higher rhetorical studies, which, by way of excellence, were designated the "artes liberales"—liberal arts—the boy, when about seventeen, would have to pursue in Rome. From the happy family life of his beloved home the young man must be separated, but he took with

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him, as an inestimable dowry, from the paternal mansion, into that new life, old Roman earnestness, noble rank and deeply-grounded piety.

It was indeed a new life that encircled the newcomer in the Eternal City. The Rome of marble and granite was still standing. Its temples still towered above it; its forums, with their porticoes and statuary, were everywhere in evidence; its triumphal arches soared aloft; its palaces displayed their solemn grandeur. One of the most distinguished contemporaries of our Saint, Cassiodorus, could write at that time: "The ancients have enumerated seven wonders of the world, but they are all surpassed by the amazing picture which this one city presents. One may truthfully say that Rome is a wonder." In the streets of that ancient city the old life still flowed on. Even the old watchword of the masses: "Panem et circenses"—Bread and the circus — had not yet become obsolete. Theodoric himself undertook to provide bread, and the chariot races in the circus still held the breathless attention of the multitude. The lictors with their forces walked before the magnificently arrayed consuls; the Senate published its resolutions on tablets of marble or brass in the vestibules of the baths, which in those days were the ordinarily frequented resorts of social intercourse. The splendour of a past of many centuries and of a glory reaching to the ends of the earth enveloped the city

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and her institutions. Her charm must certainly have made an impression on our young Nursian fresh from the study of Ennius and Virgil. And yet it is true that all this outward magnificence could not hide from the eyes of one who saw more deeply the political ruin of the city. The ruler of the Empire, who was very soon to be the only Consul of Rome, already sat enthroned in Byzantium: and was it not a Goth who held sway over Italy and the "Queen of Cities"?

Notwithstanding all, Rome was still a power: but she traced that power not to the municipal capital nor to the imperial palace. The Basilica of St Peter was even then the centre of the world. Hence Prosper of Aquitaine could sing in 430: "Rome, the venerated See of St Peter, has become, through its glorious pastoral office, the capital of the world; and what the city failed to conquer by the power of her arms, she has now acquired by the virtue of religion." From the time that Leo the Great, by saving the city from the sword of a Genseric and an Attila, had been styled the "Father of his country," the importance of the Papacy in the history of the world appeared in an ever clearer light. The chair of Peter became the ideal fulcrum of the nations of the West. And it was precisely this superior power of the Papacy, which originated in circumstances, and which began to increase outside the purely ecclesiastical sphere,

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that became the object of suspicious apprehension in the Eastern Roman Empire. The strenuous favouring and furthering of the heresy of one divine nature in Christ, which wholly absorbed His human nature, on the part of Basiliscus, Zeno and Anastasius, has with justice been called the monophysite church polity of the Emperors. Not zeal for religion, but the supposed interests of the state, moved them to uphold heresy. Byzantium wished to subject the Western Church also to the yoke of its imperial popedom. Rome, however, proved herself the protectress of sound doctrine and the shield of ecclesiastical liberty. Greek peculiarities and overweening self-esteem led at this time (484) to the first religious schism between the Eastern and Western halves of the Roman Empire. After this rupture between Rome and Constantinople, Popes Felix III. and Gelasius I. had observed an extreme reserve towards the Emperor and his ambitious court patriarch Acacius. The peace-loving Anastasius II. (496-498), on the other hand, believed that he ought to act differently. To come to an understanding with the Orient, he made advances to the Emperor as far as lay in his power, but died before a reconciliation was reached. His action proved fatal to Rome. Two parties immediately confronted each other there: one of them devoted to the Emperor and ready to purchase the political unity of the

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Empire with the most far-reaching religious concessions; the other unyielding in its maintenance of the purity of the faith and of the independence of the Church. The rupture which this wrought in the Roman community became manifest after the death of Pope Anastasius and in the election of his successor. The true ecclesiastically-minded electors chose the deacon Symmachus, a man of the old school, for Pope. The partisans of the Emperor, who, thanks to the intrigues of the Byzantine Court, were more numerous, selected on the same day the anti-pope Laurentius. From the fact that he was elected first, with all the requirements of legal form, Symmachus was recognised as the legitimate Pope by the Arian, Theodoric the Great, who was then master of Italy. But this only healed the quarrel exteriorly and for a short time. Rome actually suffered, while the Acacian quarrel, between the Orient and Occident, maintained itself for many years in virtue of the Laurentian schism.

It was not therefore an ideal picture of Church life that presented itself to the eyes of the youthful Benedict when he was studying in Rome about the years 497-500. What he saw and heard of the ecclesiastical situation was lamentable. He felt painfully the contrast between the peaceful mountain community which he had just left and the flock of blessed Peter troubled by party intrigues.

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No doubt his whole heart belonged to the rightful pastor, and to all those who along with him guarded faithfully the holy and pure doctrine of Christ, true God and true Man. By this intimate adhesion he already felt himself to be a protector of truth and justice. A new interest in his inherited and beloved faith, and the consciousness of a responsibility far transcending personality, awoke in the high-minded youth. Instead of acting depressingly on his soul, these difficult conditions conduced rather to the deepening of his interior and religious life.

How many elevating things the Eternal City had, on the other hand, to offer him! Would he not inhale pure joy and holy enthusiasm in the basilica of the Prince of the Apostles, with its touching mosaics? Would he not feel inspired and moved at the grave of a St Laurence or a St Sebastian, of a St Agnes or a St Cecilia or in the silent depths of the Catacombs? Did not everything there speak of faith and love, of conflict and suffering, of conquest and triumph? Would not all these deepening religious impressions which filled the young man with a thousand new thoughts have crowded in upon the appointed intellectual routine, upon the studies which had brought him thither?

According to the custom of the day, Benedict had at Rome to devote himself particularly to the study of forensic eloquence; and with it, dialectic philosophy went hand in hand. In one as in the

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other, for they were both still flourishing on the basis of prechristian antiquity, the form dominated the thought. And if the instruction of the ancients was always, in its essence, directed towards the culture of form, the preceding age had intensified this tendency beyond measure. The contents of a discourse were, one might say, no longer considered, if only words were well chosen, the periods constructed according to the rules of rhetoric and the images plentiful. Whoever wished to become a dialectician or a philosopher, had to aim at being able to prove with equal readiness that the most contradictory statements were true.

So in the whole life of the University the phrase reigned supreme. The science of Law which, from its very nature and purpose, could least of all set forth its real content to advantage by a jingle of words, was no more free from bombast than was that of Rhetoric.

We may well suppose that St Benedict, who even in his youth gave evidence of a mature seriousness, found but little satisfaction in the artificial arts of dialectic and rhetoric. Indeed the book of his Rule, with all its richness of thought, is clothed in the simplest and plainest language. He would be much more attracted, we can easily imagine, by jurisprudence, which, through the casuistic method in use at the time, was really in touch with life, and for which the Romans possessed such an eminent talent.

That St Benedict studied law is more than a

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gratuitous assumption. He was the first to impress upon the monastic rule a distinctly juridical character and to write a law book—*lex*—for monks. Besides a delicate sense of justice, his well-developed judicial point of view, and his familiarity with the legal terminology of Rome, warrant us in supposing that the author of the Rule devoted at least part of his time of study in Rome to the art of right and justice—"ars boni et æqui." It can hardly have given full satisfaction, however, to the aspiring soul of the noble youth.

But the social side of academic life appealed to him even less than its scientific. He saw many of his fellows engulfed without hope in the whirlpool of passion. The painful experience that the allurements of the capital were strong enough to bring ruin to many by no means ignoble characters affected him deeply. If we believe St Gregory, it was the wild ways of the students that made residence in Rome intolerable to him. At any rate he left the Eternal City without having fully finished his studies. But we have reason to suppose that other motives as well entered into this resolution.

We have already mentioned the ecclesiastical situation in Rome and the impression it must have made upon the earnest Nursian. The more he observed the development of things, the more he was confronted with the question, whether, in the circumstances, something could not be done

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for the beloved Church. Could he not place at the service of the Church and her cause those powers which he was now employing and forming in study and which he intended before long to dedicate to his native city or to the state? Instead of eloquence and jurisprudence should he not rather devote himself to Christian doctrine and Church discipline? Did not all his personal qualifications urge and draw him that way?

Considerations of this nature must have guided Benedict, and the supposition is confirmed by the first step which he took after renouncing his worldly studies. He left Rome and the circle of his hitherto friends and acquaintances and went into the solitude of the country to prepare for his vocation. We are not informed of the length of his Roman sojourn. Perhaps he had finished not much more than half of the five years' course which the Roman law school prescribed for jurists, when at the age of about twenty he entered upon a new career.

To-day the little chapel in Piscinula still piously preserves the memory of Benedict's student years. Historically, this sanctuary can only be associated with the former Cassinese dependency in Trastevere, which was founded in the tenth century and has since kept the name of the Saint alive in this place. Whatever has been said about an immediate connection of the sanctuary with St Benedict himself is legendary.

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Accompanied only by his nurse, who loved him as a mother, the youth passed out of the Porta Tiburtina on the road to Tivoli, and skirting the magnificent palace of Hadrian went to Enfide in his native Sabine hills. What Gregory the Great relates of our Saint's relations there, almost awakens the suspicion that Benedict himself was not quite clear about the purpose which he had in view in remaining in that remote mountain town. It is hardly to be wondered at, therefore, if Gregory's informants, who were interested solely in Benedict's monastic life should have regarded his antecedent history as of trifling value. As to Gregory himself it is evident that he mentions Benedict's stay at Enfide incidentally and only because it was the scene of our Saint's first miracle. We learn from him that our young man dwelt there in company with other "respectable" men by the Episcopal or parochial Church of St Peter, which is called the "ecclesia" (church) not an "oratorium" (oratory), which would mean a private or monastic church. His nurse looked after his housekeeping. There is no word to indicate the monastic character of the community here spoken of. On the contrary, the expressions used point to a society which had gathered around the Church, yet was so little bound by monastic organisation that each individual had his own household, over which even a woman might preside. All this is easily explained on the

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hypothesis that the bishop or pastor of Enfide had received different classes of men who were being prepared under his direction for the service of the Church. Private instruction in the more profound mysteries of the doctrines of faith and in the practical ministry by an experienced bishop or priest was in those days the ordinary preparation for the priestly office. And so the few lines in which Gregory the Great rather faintly sketches the surroundings of Benedict at Enfide might justify us in supposing that the young student had left the turmoil of the capital of the world to learn ecclesiastical science in the country under an approved master, and then return perhaps once more, should a favourable occasion offer, to the Roman community. How long Benedict remained at Enfide, whether, while there, he received clerical ordination, and whether it was there he laid the foundation of that knowledge of the Fathers which distinguished him in after life, are questions to which there can never be an answer. All we know is the extraordinary incident which not only brought his sojourn at Enfide suddenly to an end, but precipitated the decisive turn of his life—the resolve to become a monk.

Benedict's careful housekeeper had one day borrowed from a neighbour an earthenware sieve with which to sift and cleanse some wheat. When the work was done she left the sieve thoughtlessly

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on the table and there, by an unhappy accident, it fell to the ground and was broken in two pieces. The good old woman was inconsolable and in tears she made her sorrow known to her master. The grief of his faithful nurse touched his heart. He spoke words of comfort to her and then, taking up the fragments of the broken vessel, betook himself to prayer. In a short time he brought the sieve back to her whole and entire. The happy woman could hardly believe her eyes: she related the wonderful story throughout the neighbourhood, and then like wild-fire the cry ran through the place: "A Saint!" "A Saint!" The sieve was withdrawn from domestic use and hung up above the door of the church, where it remained until the invasion of the Lombards, a reminder to those who entered of the miraculous prayer of a pious youth.

From the moment that the knowledge of the miracle reached the people, the position of Benedict at Enfide was entirely altered. He was no longer one of the many who by prayer and study were preparing for holy orders. Henceforth he was the one towards whom all eyes were turned, the one who arrested the admiration and veneration of all. Even to his fellow-students he was "Il santo," the Saint. This was an intolerable situation for a man striving after true, interior sanctity, for one who had renounced himself and

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wished to live only for God and for His Church. The wish to serve the Church must now become secondary to the care for his own salvation. If a certain self-complacency, a first germ of pride were not to take root in his heart, he must withdraw from the respectful reverence of the people of Enfide and from the admiring looks and words of his companions. Benedict rightly weighed the danger that had so suddenly confronted him. He wished to save his soul at all hazards. Then the thought of the monastic life, which had perhaps already and often occupied him, now burst upon him in a new and clearer light. Was not that for so many the secure way to salvation? He will therefore leave Enfide and knock at the door of the cloister. But how? Will his reputation not follow him thither? And if extraordinary things should manifest themselves in him even there, would he not attract universal attention? No, he must not live in community with others: he must hide himself in solitude: he must become a hermit.

Thus may the young man have reasoned with himself when the action of God decided his life. He wished to be a hermit. And so he stole away secretly from the place and from the Church of St Peter, which he had learned to love, and from the nurse who had tended him with a mother's care, hard as it must have been for him. Hitherto,

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in full understanding with his relatives, he had walked in quiet and not too extraordinary ways. Now he severed the most intimate ties, fled stealthily from the world, and wished to remain dead and buried to all.

The veil of night still hung over the slumbering little town when Benedict took his departure from it and by unknown mountain paths sought a home in the solitudes. After long and painful wanderings he came at last to Subiaco and entered the valley of the Anio, the roar and rush of whose waters is re-echoed by its rocky walls. At that particular place the wild mountain torrent had been used at the time to form an artificial lake in whose clear waters were mirrored the desolate remains of the once proud villa of Nero. Perhaps the surprising sight of this magnificent ruin in an isolated and rocky valley was holding the attention of our eager wanderer riveted to the place, when he encountered a monk, who questioned him as to the whence and whither of his way. Benedict entrusted himself to the man consecrated to God and found in him a faithful friend and helper.

Romanus, that was the monk's name, must certainly have offered to the stranger the hospitality of his monastery, which was close by: and when he learned that the youth had made up his mind to leave the world he no doubt invited him to begin his new life under the direction of his abbot Adeoda-

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tus. But he was soon convinced that Benedict was not to be changed from his resolution to become a hermit. Romanus promised to keep absolute silence about what he had heard, and conducted the new-comer into a rocky cave beneath the monastery, which afforded only the most necessary shelter from storm and rain to its self-denying inhabitant. That same day perhaps he gave him the monastic habit—a melote made of the skin of animals such as the Egyptian monks were used to wear. By the acceptance of this habit, our Saint, according to the prevailing idea of the time, pledged himself before God and the Church to the monastic state for the rest of his days. The habit was the outward sign of conversion from a worldly life to one dedicated to God. The decisive step was now taken. And thus Benedict was almost secretly initiated into that religious state whose law-giver in the West he was destined to become.

And now for three long years he lived in his dreary cavern entirely isolated from the converse of men, save that of the monk Romanus, whom he saw occasionally when he brought him the scanty fare which he had himself spared from his own austere monastic allowance. As the abbot Adeodatus was not to know anything of the hermit's presence the task of Romanus was by no means easy. Anyhow, Benedict was sufficiently cared for, so much so indeed that he always had a little

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piece of bread left for his daily guest, a raven from the neighbouring woods.

Early, when the sun poured his first golden rays over the high mountain ranges of Subiaco, and at eve, when his purple splendour gleamed upon their rock-built walls, casting long, pensive, violet shadows, he saw our Saint absorbed in silent prayer. And at night, when the stars lit up the sky and the white mists rose from the still surface of the lake, the man of God might be seen upon his knees with arms outstretched towards heaven. The world with all its contents lay at an immeasurable distance from him. The monotonous murmur of the Anio was the only sound from without that fell upon his ear. Far from all earthly things he lived in the presence of God. The life of the first Fathers of Monasticism, of a Paul and an Anthony, began to be revived in the cave of Subiaco. And there can hardly be a doubt but that it was Benedict's sole intention to persevere in this life of holy contemplation, with all its external hardships and its interior conflicts, with its spiritual trials and its overflowing graces and consolations until his death. With the iron energy of the Roman he pushed his flight from the world to the utmost bounds of possibility.

The renunciation of all worldly honours and joys by his departure from Rome was followed after the miracle in Enfide by the renunciation

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of all external activity in any and every ecclesiastical office, and in the hermitage of Subiaco the abandonment of even ecclesiastical life. True, the life of a hermit was a form of religious life approved by the Church as the most sublime degree of self-denial, but unquestionably only for those whose strength of soul would not fail on the stony wastes of the silent wilderness, but gave promise of growing strong and of blossoming out into full perfection there. The call of God had led Benedict into solitude and now His grace sustained and sanctified him. At the same time the youthful enthusiasm of the beginner in the spiritual combat had to undergo painful trials. He certainly did not escape the inevitable struggle with vain self-satisfaction, discouragement and weariness. In after years he spoke with such marked reserve of the "fervor novitius"—the first fervour of conversion from the world to God, which he would by no means recognise as a proper foundation for the eremitical life without previous schooling in a monastery. The judgment was based on personal experience. The entire separation of the Saint from the whole outer world is brought sensibly before us by Gregory the Great at the moment when Benedict for the first time after three years comes once more into passing contact with the ecclesiastical sphere.

On Easter Sunday a priest in the neighbour-

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hood of Subiaco had provided a festive meal for himself. Suddenly, as Benedict's biographer tells us, the Lord appeared to him and said: "You have luxuries set before you while My servant in his cave is suffering from hunger." Thereupon the priest rose up, took with him the food that was already prepared and sought the man of God in his cavern, which he discovered with difficulty and only after long wanderings through the winding ravine, through woods and brush. At first they engaged in spiritual conversation, then the priest disclosed the provisions he had brought with him and invited Benedict to a common repast, saying: "Now we shall eat because to-day is Easter." "Very well," replied the hermit, accepting the pleasant tone, "it is really Easter for me to-day since I have the happiness of seeing you here." "That is not all," said the other. "To-day is actually the Feast of the Resurrection of Our Lord, a day on which it is not permissible even for you to fast, and so I have been sent to you directly by God that together we may refresh ourselves with His gifts." With grateful hearts they partook of their meal and then the priest returned to his church. The great Feast of Easter, the very sun of the ecclesiastical year, around which as their centre the other holy seasons group themselves, and which in the early Church was regarded as the starting-point of the whole life of Christian worship, the

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hermit of Subiaco had lost sight of. In fact, later on, he must have seen the time which he had passed as a hermit in another light, when he brought his own life and that of his disciples into most intimate relation with the liturgy.

Soon after the visit of the priest our Saint gained access to the little world of shepherds and peasants that lay around him. One day some shepherds in search of a lost portion of their flocks came into the vicinity of his cave. Through the thicket that concealed the entrance to it they perceived a coarse, hairy melote, and thought they had seen an animal. But soon they were face to face with a hermit living a life of penance. The pious man received them with so much kindness that shortly after they sought him out again in company with the rest of the villagers and listened gladly to his instructions. And thus teaching and preaching became all at once the occupation of our hermit. With plain and unadorned discourse he tried to introduce these simple mountaineers to the knowledge and the practice of Christian truth. The grateful people on their side were delighted to provide for the sustenance of their teacher and friend. And thus the faithful Romanus was relieved of his task.

But even in the outer life of Benedict a change had taken place. In a very short time a path had been opened through the wilderness to his rocky retreat. Whosoever in any of the neighbouring villages or

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People came to him.

in the shepherds' solitary huts stood in need of counsel or consolation made his way to the man of God, confident that he would help him or at least pray for him. He may have healed many a painful wound and alleviated many a sorrow. He was able to warn them beforehand against many dangers and prevent many injustices. It would seem as if this close contact with human needs and human sufferings had softened the harshness of the renunciation of the world and toned down the desperate earnestness which in the beginning of his sojourn at Subiaco had enveloped our Saint. Now he drew nearer to the earth and its miseries.

For those who had to visit him that may have been a great happiness. But was it the same for himself? Had he not to leave his blessed heaven of contemplation and forfeit his undisturbed peace, when he thus came in contact, if only at a distance, with earthly things and circumstances?

Before a wider circle of activity opened out to him it was necessary that his fidelity to his vocation and his entire abandonment to God should be tested and proved by fire.

In his intercourse with the Sabine peasants the Saint discovered not only sin and sorrow but much innocent joy and unalloyed happiness. Everything in the world was not wicked: there was much in it that was good and beautiful. He found likewise a noble charity among men. Had he not

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in separating himself from evil and sin, shut himself out also from good and from happiness ?

This train of thought might have appealed to his senses when the dead silence of his hermitage weighed heaviest upon him, and when the cawing of his black-feathered companion made him feel that he was all alone and far from the haunts of men.

No one thought of him. His happiness or his misery interested no one. No heart beat in intimate sympathy with his. He was surrounded by bare cold rocks that chilled him. In such a moment of deepest dereliction, memories long buried live again. A delicate female figure which he had once known flitted before his soul. Her form laid a spell of all earthly happiness upon his hard, secluded life. He burned with the desire of human love. Impetuously the young heart craves its rights. Happiness lies in the world, not in the solitude of a rocky tomb. He can no longer bear the loneliness—he must go forth.

The conflict raged fearfully. His whole being was agitated. And still the thought of flight was not fully thought out, his foot was not yet set free, when his painfully troubled eye fell upon the thorn bushes that grew luxuriantly before his cave. Like a flash of lightning the perception of the whole great danger dawned upon him, and he immediately obeyed the command of duty which years of self-discipline had taught him.

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He divested himself of his melote, threw himself into the midst of the thorns and rolled (himself) therein until the blood broke forth from a thousand wounds. The self-denying love of God had stifled and expiated the ardour of earthly desire. St Benedict had triumphantly overcome in the life and death struggle the crisis of his life.

He continued in his solitude, now full of that peace which the world cannot give. From that hour of horror and of grace he remained a stranger to every movement of lustful desire. His happiness lay not in the promising distance, it resided within him and now, after a vehement effort, he had found it for ever.

The humble people who came to and went from Benedict's cave could not imagine that the man whom they saw had a few hours before stood at the critical juncture of his life and, bleeding and trembling from pain, had vanquished himself. They could perceive no change in him, except perhaps that his eye shone more brightly and that he seemed to receive them more kindly. To them he was the fatherly friend sent by God. Everywhere they told of the saintly hermit, and soon there was no one within a wide circle who did not know his name. His fame penetrated even into the neighbouring monasteries.

But how many peasants would pause with astonishment in their work when, from the valley of

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the Anio, they saw a train of monks ascending the rocky path that led to the hermit's cave! It was the small monastic community of Vicovaro near Tivoli that thus wended their way. Their abbot had died and now they came to the hermit so praised by all the people and besought him to become their abbot and father.

Whatever reports Benedict had heard of their monastery must have been very unfavourable. He refused at first to follow the monks and declared without circumlocution that it was not his intention to conform to their scarcely serious manner of life. At last, however, he yielded to their pathetic entreaties and plentiful promises, left the beloved spot of his happy solitude and went with them to Vicovaro. The monastic foundation there consisted of a number of caverns, some greater, some smaller, which even to-day are still accessible from above on the steep, almost perpendicular, wall of rock, at the foot of which the foaming Anio rushes along.

The primitive exterior of the monastic settlement already suggested the likelihood that a mixed form of monasticism, composed of hermits and cenobites, according to Oriental models, was established there. The monks, therefore, lived separately and alone in caves, but assembled in the oratory at the appointed times for the divine service, which they celebrated in common, and in the refectory

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at the hours fixed for the regular meals. Both oratory and refectory were alike great chambers in the rock. This mode of life carried with it the danger of degeneration, and of individual caprice on the part of each monk, since the watchful eye and the energetic hand of a wise abbot did not exercise control over all. Formerly this circumspect direction had been wanting. Now it was placed in Benedict's hands and very soon it was felt by the monks to be both heavy and oppressive. It was now no longer lawful for each one to decide according to his own discretion, what was allowed or not allowed. All had henceforth to follow the word of the abbot. To these Sarabaites, whose own will was their only law, this seemed downright tyranny. They murmured and complained to one another about the severity of the discipline. In their degeneracy they reproached themselves for having chosen such a superior, and consented to the criminal resolution of putting him to death. He must die by poison.

The little community was assembled in the deep grotto that served as a refectory. At the beginning of the meal a brother with a cup of wine presented himself before the abbot to beg his blessing on the drink, which the superior had first to taste. At this point the murder of the father was to take place. The Saint raised his hand and made the sign of the cross over the wine, and in the same

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instant the cup fell broken in pieces to the ground. God had interfered decisively. Pale and trembling the criminals stared at the broken vessel. With a single glance Benedict recognised the abyss of corruption which thus revealed itself, and the brink of his own grave from which the Providence of God had miraculously saved him. He arose quietly. With gentle eyes and soft voice he addressed the monks: "Brethren! may Almighty God have mercy on you! Why have you wished to treat me in this way? Did I not say to you that my customs do not coincide with yours? Go now and seek out an abbot for yourselves who will concur in your manner of living! Me you can have no longer." With these words he left them and with all speed sought once more his cherished solitude at Subiaco.

He lived as before alone with God. And this was his desire: he wished to remain so. His first step into a larger circle had revealed to him, even in the very heart of monasticism, evil ways which made him shudder. Later on he wrote in his Rule: "There are ways which seem right to man, but the ends thereof lead to the depths of hell"—words which had their origin in experience. He would remain alone. But Providence had ordained otherwise for him. He had passed his monastic youth in the austere school of solitude. The vanquishing of all desires after alluring worldly

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happiness in his own heart, and the peaceful victory over the fiendish hatred of false brethren, had matured him into a man of strong character. He was now to become for others a teacher of virtue and a guide to the ideal heights of the monastic vocation.

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The Teacher

EVEN before the tragic episode of Vicovaro it is probable that one or more seekers after the lost Paradise had asked the Saint to accept them as disciples in the life of perfection. Benedict, however, had sent them all to other masters, likely to the monasteries in the neighbourhood. He did not presume to take upon himself the office of teacher; above all, he was afraid to part with his solitude and contemplation. After his miraculous escape from death he had hidden himself once more in his cave. But again young men and old, fleeing from the world, intruded themselves upon his isolation and solicited his guidance. And now he received them. Very soon we find him no longer in his rocky cavern, but in a cell in a monastery. What could have moved him to make this change in his manner of life?

The fearful incident of Vicovaro had aroused in the Saint serious considerations which extended far beyond his personality and embraced the whole monachism of his surroundings. If such a murderous project were possible in a monastery, before the

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united organism had cast out the corrupt element, there must have been formed a wrong judgment as to the fundamental conception of monastic life. The brethren of Vicovaro lived in caves, and were not wanting, it would seem, in corporal austerities; but their unmortified interiors, their disobedience and their hatred, drove them to murder their abbot. Their monastic life had become exterior. It may have been severe, but it was not a life of perfection. They belonged to that class of monk of which the Saint said later in his Rule, that "by their tonsure they lie to God." And Vicovaro was not the only one of that kind. Elsewhere in Italy monachism was understood to be a collection of ascetic prescriptions and of traditional customs and forms. In the slavish imitation of Oriental cloister life, which was at that time general in the West, lay the proximate danger of external observance without the spirit that should animate it. Hand in hand with this went an unchecked individualism, which could easily dispense with a superior, and which saw in the abbot only a functionary who according to the tradition belonged to the exterior realisation of the monastic ideal.

The event at Vicovaro had profoundly impressed upon the Saint the conviction that the essence of Christian life, interior perfection and the development of love for God and our neighbour in the heart, must form the nucleus and central fact of

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monastic life. The exterior monastic observance based on the approved tradition of the Fathers should contribute to the upbuilding and consolidation of this interior life and tendency, in such a way, however, as to take into account the character of the people, the climatic conditions and the other circumstances of Western life. It was evident, then, that observance should take its place in the second line after the essential elements of monasteries. This principle, so natural and so self-evident, was not generally followed in the Western monasteries of that day, and Benedict knew this from his own experience. In the circumstances, was it not simply a duty to point out the right way to the novice who came in good faith for instruction? Could not one of those whom he sent away easily get into wrong hands and go astray for ever?

Thus likely thought the Saint, when, for a second time, he sacrificed his beloved solitude for the sake of admitting the first novice. The number of his disciples grew rapidly. Benedict had to abandon his cave, the witness of his combats and of his happiness, and build a monastery. And so there arose, perhaps within the precincts of the Neronian villa, a home of self-denying purity over the grave of extravagant luxury—the symbol of a world-renewing power upon the ruins of the bygone glory of the Cæsars. At any rate, St Benedict's first monastery was located quite close to

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the bank of the Anio. It was not to remain long alone. Soon twelve monasteries, with twelve monks in each, arose partly in the valley and partly on the surrounding hills. And then, under the fostering care of Benedict, the monastic youth of his first disciples blossomed into beauty and holiness.

The organisation of this colony of monasteries at Subiaco is not without special peculiarities. The eremitical life had given way to the cœnobitical, which was characterised by the common life of the brethren in each of the twelve monasteries and by the obedience which they rendered to their respective abbot. And yet the formation of disciples in so many and such small communities seems intended to retain the contemplative seclusion and solitude of the eremitical life, as far as it is possible to combine it with the "vita communis," the life in common.

Each individual abbot had the complete direction of the monks assigned to him by the Saint. The chanting of the Psalms in the oratory at the fixed canonical hours of the day and night, spiritual reading and manual labour, in constant alternation, filled up the time of the monks. How many things there were for the novice to learn! The ceremonies of the divine service, the monastic observances, and the rules of the sacred chant were unknown to most of the new-comers. Many of

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them began only then to acquire the art of reading and writing. Not a few of them had only a smattering of religious knowledge, and, as St Pachomius, the originator of cœnobitical life, says in his Rule, had to be made acquainted with the Lord's Prayer and a number of Psalms. But all without exception, whether well-instructed, learned, or priest, had to labour, with great earnestness and without ceasing, at the perfecting of their own interior life, according to the divine example and ideals of the Redeemer.

In addition to this many-sided spiritual activity, manual labour had always been regarded as an essential element of the monastic life. In the workshops of the cloister many followed the handicraft by which they had gained their livelihood in the world. And as art was considered a handicraft among the Romans—"ars"—it was undoubtedly cultivated in the cells of the monks. In building the monasteries around the lake, as later at Monte Cassino, the brethren devoted themselves to work. There was one work, however, in which all had sometimes to bear a part, namely, the cultivation of the fields and the garden. Many a drop of sweat must have fallen, in harvest-time, upon those stony fields, under the burning sun. This did not escape the watchful eye of St Benedict. In his Rule, whose first beginnings, at least in substance and practice, if not yet in writing, must be sought in

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Subiaco, he gives the abbot authority to allow the monks, in times of strenuous labour, a more abundant table than usual, avoiding, however, all superfluities. The faint-hearted he encouraged with the assurance that they would only be true monks when they lived by the work of their hands, "as did our Fathers and the Apostles." "But," he adds, "in the matter of work, all must be done with moderation, on account of the weak and infirm."

Without interfering with the regular course of the monastic life in the several communities, Benedict's eye and hand controlled the whole congregation of the brethren. All of them, both abbots and monks, had graduated from his school. His name had drawn them. It would seem even that, until he took leave of the vale of the Anio, he reserved to himself the training of the novices. Not only does Gregory the Great say expressly that he kept about him those who still needed special instruction, but we invariably see the younger brethren in his immediate surroundings, though all looked upon him as their father and master. If anything unusual happened, they sought his counsel and assistance. While each of the twelve monasteries formed a separate little family, with an abbot for its father, the entire colony felt themselves like a patriarchal community, under the authority of their common teacher St Benedict. He was the soul of the whole monastic settlement.

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His nod, his word and his prayer almost imperceptibly interwove its everyday life with miracles. Now it is the border of the lake, and again the steep, rocky height, that are the scene of his quiet but miraculously blest activity. The splendour and glory of joyful strivings after perfection, and the mysterious breath of the supernatural nearness of God shed a heavenly poetry over the life of the first monks of Subiaco.

From the time when St Benedict had opened his "school for the service of God," his name, as that of one found again, had been heard once more in Rome. Relations, which years before had been so hastily broken off, were now renewed by higher spiritual ties. Thus we find among the visitors at Subiaco two noble Romans, Equitius and Tertullus, who entrusted their sons, Maurus and Placid, to the Saint, to have them educated for the monastic life. Maurus was already in the ripeness of mature youth, and was soon able to assist his master in the formation of the novices. Placid, on the contrary, was still a child: but just for that reason he is the most remarkable figure in the circle of Benedict's first disciples, and St Gregory in his *Dialogues* has sketched him with evident predilection.

With ready zeal, but also with youthful thoughtlessness, Placid executed the orders that were given him. Thus he rushed to the lake one day to fetch water, and, bending down too low in order to reach

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the water more quickly, the rapidly filling pitcher drew him into the depths. Soon the waves had carried him as far as one can shoot an arrow from the shore. But the Saint in his cell knew instantly of the danger, and calling Maurus, who was no doubt occupied out of doors, said to him: "Run as fast as you can to the lake, Placid has fallen into the water." With the blessing of the abbot, Maurus made haste accordingly, ran upon the water and, grasping the boy by the hair, brought him to land. But how frightened he was when, after placing the boy in safety, he perceived that he had walked many steps upon the water. Nothing but the command of the master could have worked such a miracle. St Benedict, to whom he related the incident, would only see in this divine action the reward of Maurus's obedience. Then, unasked, little Placid took part in the pious contest. "When Maurus drew me from the water," he declared, "I saw the melote of the abbot over me. It was he that rescued me." Against this decision there was no appeal. The disciples knew too well what they owed to the intercession of their master; especially as Placid had been, so lately, an eye-witness of the power of his abbot's prayer.

Three monasteries of the Religious colony of Subiaco, which could not find room in the valley, had been built upon the rocky height above and far removed from water. Each day the brothers had

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to descend to the lake for it, and were often in danger of their lives on account of the falling rocks. Very soon the monks had enough of this tiring and perilous way of procuring their water supply, and so they represented to the Saint that the three monasteries, which were no doubt constructed of wood, would have to be transferred to a more suitable place. They do not seem to have realised that in this request there lay an unformulated reproof of their master in as much as he had ordered them to be built where they stood. Benedict, however, received his sons' petition in a fatherly spirit, and dismissed them with comforting words. The following night, he ascended the hill with little Placid as his sole companion, and tarried there a long time in prayer. He then placed three stones on top of one another and returned to his cloister, unobserved by anyone save the boy. Next morning the brethren of the three monasteries appeared once more in his presence and renewed their request. He answered: "Return home, and where you find three stones laid one over the other, dig there." The monks obeyed, and immediately under their spades a well began to flow, which furnished sufficient water for their wants, and even ran down into the lake. Placid never looked at this new rivulet without remembering the miraculous prayer of his master, beneath the stars, on that solitary height—an effective school of prayer for a boy! And so we

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see standing by the venerable figure of St Benedict, the youthful Placid, in his innocent simplicity, and his presence there tones down the austere seriousness which characterised the father of monks. It distinguishes the august Patriarch, at the same time, as a truly great man, who does not disdain to bend lovingly down to the soul of the child and accommodate himself to it. To all those whom he had ever received as his disciples he was a kind and devoted father, even though their lack of capacity, or, what was still more, their laziness, might sometimes put his patience to a severe test.

Benedict had with joy given a shelter to a good-hearted but simple Goth, who had most likely been converted under the influence of his Italian surroundings, from Arianism to the Catholic faith. In the cloister he could learn more fully the true doctrine of salvation and follow it more faithfully, even if he were not able to accompany his better-instructed brethren on the ideal way of a higher spiritual life. Where hard physical labour was required he was the man for it. And so one day he was occupied in rooting-out a thicket of bushes to clear a space for a garden plot. With all his might he was wielding his heavy axe and hewing away at the brushwood, when suddenly the axe slipped from the handle, and flew with a great curve into the lake. The Goth, quite terrified, went to Maurus, who was superintending the work,

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and humbly accused himself of the damage he had caused. Maurus, in turn, informed St Benedict of the occurrence. Immediately the abbot appeared, took the axe-handle out of the hand of the Goth and held it in the lake. A moment later the axe adhered to the handle, and the Saint delivered the restored implement to the industrious brother, with the words: "See, here is your axe; continue your work in peace and don't be sad."

In what a masterly way Benedict here deals with the humblest of his disciples. The simplicity with which he gives him back the axe, which he had drawn from the depths of the lake, must have filled the poor Goth with astonishment and reverence. And how helpful to him were the kindly words of the holy master! Stranger as he was, he possessed a father in Benedict, who had distinguished him before the whole crowd of his disciples by the working of a miracle, and had honoured him even in the eyes of the sons of the Roman nobility. How that must have increased his happiness in his vocation.

But in this scene there is likewise mirrored the actual situation of Rome and Italy at the time. The Gothic regime, mild though it may have been, was felt to be humiliating by all who continued to regard the "Imperium" as their ideal. They were barbarians who now governed the Roman people. The right of the stronger was the only foundation of their power. How entirely different was the situa-

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tion at Subiaco, where the might of the Spirit held sway. The Goth dwelt happily with the Romans, as a brother among brethren in the cloister of St Benedict: but here he was a servant.

This episode is quite typical of the future of Roman monachism in Germany. Has not the Rule of St Benedict become for Germany an instrument of ennobling Christian civilisation? It has ennobled labour and so made it possible, for those who profess it, to awaken and promote joy in the work of civilisation among the German people.

The affectionate teacher, though bending down to the weakest, knew also, when it was necessary, how to strengthen the unstable of character with prudent severity. He did not disdain on occasion to use the rod, and by painful and humiliating punishment bring superficial souls to obedience. This was the experience of a monk who, under futile pretexts, left the church regularly, when the brethren, at the close of the liturgical service of God, gave themselves to contemplative prayer, as was the custom in Oriental monasteries. The admonitions of his own abbot Pompeianus and of his former venerable instructor proved ineffectual, but the strokes of the rod led him to lasting amendment. And so, if beside the active zeal for observance which animated all, human weakness now and then made its appearance, the Saint knew always how to handle it, and either by gentleness or severity, turn

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it to his sons' salvation and their good. Under his wise direction the monastic colony of Subiaco developed into a happy, God-fearing brotherhood.

All too soon, however, there crept over this bright picture a dark cloud, whose deep shadows have hidden from us its further development.

A priest, named Florentius, who was in charge of a neighbouring church, had for some time observed with envious eyes the vigorously sprouting life in the valley of the Anio. What Benedict gained in authority was, he thought, that much lost to him. Wherefore he began to spread calumnies about the Saint and strove by every means to rob him of the confidence of the people. The result, however, was just the contrary of what he sought. People, seeking consolation and needing help, came in ever-increasing numbers to the man of God, and no one departed from him without gratefully commending both his virtue and his charity. They followed his counsels willingly, and his beneficent activity was borne witness to by all those who, at his word, began to lead new and better lives. Such experiences, however, only irritated still more the unhappy priest, until he did not even shrink from the thought of murder. If hatred had put poison in the wine at Vicovaro, envy here mixed death-dealing flour in the bread.

Blessed bread, which among the early Christians

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was a symbol of happy unity in the true faith and in holy fraternal charity, was to become, in the hands of the blinded Florentius, an insidious weapon of death. He sent the Saint a poisoned gift of blessed, but not consecrated, bread—as a token of his friendship; but the traitorous deed miscarried. Benedict had a presentiment of the crime of which he himself was the intended victim. He therefore threw the bread to the raven, which was wont to come at midday to receive its nourishment from the hand of the man of God, and commanded it to carry far away the dangerous loaf and drop it in some place that was inaccessible to men. The raven, cawing loudly and with outspread wings, refused for a long time to take hold of the bread, but when ordered anew by the Saint, it seized it in its beak and flew away with it. After three hours it returned again and received its daily ration.

Florentius was soon aware that his attack on the life of the monk whom he hated, was unsuccessful. This inflamed his fury to the utmost and he now conceived the diabolic plan of poisoning the souls of Benedict's disciples, knowing that thereby he would hit the Saint on his most sensitive point and at the same time most effectively sap the reputation of the monastic colony. Dissolute girls were sent to ruin the young monks. But the virtue of his disciples was dearer to St Benedict than his own life, and as soon as he became aware of the danger that

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threatened them he resolved without hesitation to give way to the infernal hatred of his enemy and to leave Subiaco. He accordingly made the necessary arrangements for his monasteries and then accompanied by a few of his monks, he bade adieu to his beloved valley by the Anio, and went forth to find a new home. Florentius received information of the departure of the Saint, and from the balcony of his house viewed triumphantly the little party of travellers. He had conquered after all. The much-admired monk would not any longer stand in his way. But how soon and how fearfully his intoxication of delight was to end!

The wandering monks had not gone more than a few miles from Subiaco when Maurus, to whom most likely was confided the government of the monastery which Benedict had abandoned, overtook them and joyfully exclaimed to the master: "Return, the priest who persecuted you is dead." God's punishment had unexpectedly fallen upon the malicious man. The balcony on which he stood had collapsed and buried him under its ruins. The Saint received this message of death with the deepest sorrow. He bewailed aloud the terrible end of the priest, snatched away in his sins. And, as the man of God had accustomed himself for a long time to regard and judge all occurrences in a supernatural light, he felt no little pain at a certain tone of exultation that was discernible in the words of

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Maurus. He corrected the disciple severely and imposed a penance upon him.

Even under the now entirely altered circumstances Benedict had no thought of returning to Subiaco. Divine Providence had placed a wanderer's staff in his hand: following that Providence he directed his steps towards the goal to which it pointed.

The departure of St Benedict from Subiaco was a turning-point in his life. Gregory the Great has recognised this, and in his ingenious way has given expression to it with special emphasis. He allows the Saint's wonderful achievements—for he deems them alone worthy of notice—to pass once more before his mental vision and then he perceives how his miracles connect him in the most intimate manner with the most celebrated heroes of divine revelation. Like Moses, Benedict had caused water to spring from a rock: like a second Eliseus he made the iron implement rise from the bottom of the lake: at his command Maurus walked upon the water as Peter had once walked on the sea: a raven rendered him obedience as formerly a raven had served Elias, and like David he wept over the death of his persecutor. In St Gregory's eyes St Benedict is one of those who "was filled with the spirit of all the just," and is worthy to rank with the sublime figures of the Prophets and Apostles.

And thus in the language of the *Dialogues* the fact is announced that the personality of the man of God

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had now reached its full maturity. The form of life which, in the new surroundings, he henceforth observed along with his disciples, he has embodied in his Rule, and it has thereby become for centuries the model of monastic life in the West. Not only the years of severest solitude, but the time of his activity in the monastic colony of Subiaco as well, were part of the preparation which enabled him to solve the problem of his life. On the lofty summit of Monte Cassino his vocation found its fulfilment.

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The Abbot

HAVING lost St Benedict for the moment in the forest paths of the Sabine hills, Gregory the Great discloses him to us again, quite abruptly, on the heights of Monte Cassino. Almost half-way between Rome and Naples, the Via Latina, which connects these two cities, skirts this steep and prominent mountain. A little above the level of the valley, close to the rocky wall, nestles the fortified town of Casinum, now San Germano. From there a path winds upwards to a height some two thousand feet above, where it ends even to-day in the imposing remains of an ancient pelasgic fortress, which in the olden times crowned the summit of the rock. With that first settlement a place of culture was founded here, which, under varying forms, has continued to that time. In the year 1879 a dedicatory inscription was found, which testifies that in the second century after Christ a temple of Jupiter, with porticoes and all other accompanying edifices had been erected in this spot on cyclopean foundations. This is the sanctuary that Benedict found on his arrival. Mark, who lived there after the death

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of St Benedict, but before the first destruction, somewhere between 542 and 581, speaks in the few verses of his that have come down to us of a temple of Jupiter on the monastic mountain. And this is only apparently contradicted by St Gregory, who wrote later and presumes that the temple on Monte Cassino was dedicated to Apollo. It was really a sanctuary which had been built in honour of Jupiter by the triumvirs of the town of Casinum, but was popularly known as a temple of Apollo.

Mark relates in his poem what he had learned from the inscription, and Gregory the Great, or rather the disciples of St Benedict, who are his authorities, records what popular tradition had to say about this heathen temple. It was still standing in its brilliant marble grandeur when Benedict and his monks reached the top of the mountain. The considerations and circumstances which induced him to direct his steps thither are shrouded from us in impenetrable darkness. Untenable legends of a much later time tell of a donation of Tertullus, the father of St Placid, but it is only the poet Mark, the oldest authority for the life of Benedict, who throws the dimmest ray of light upon the migration of the Saint from Subiaco to Monte Cassino. In his poem on St Benedict he says :

> "Hic (Christus) quoque viventi justo prædixerat uni
> His tu parce locis, alter amicus adest."

According to the earliest tradition, therefore,

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Benedict seems to have received his new home from a pious inhabitant of the place. Perhaps the magistrates of the town of Cassino had placed the disposal of the temple in his hands. For a long time there had been no regular veneration of Apollo practised there. Only ignorant and superstitious peasants continued to offer in secret the sacrifices which were now forbidden by law. With the acceptance of this legacy from ancient paganism the Saint at the same time undertook the task of preaching the Gospel to the surrounding population. His first aim, however, was the establishment of a monastery. And, after all, this was the surest means to success for future missionary activity.

Benedict and his disciples went vigorously to work to consecrate to the true God the sanctuary that for centuries had been devoted to the worship of the ancient gods of Rome. The statue of Apollo fell to pieces under the blows of the monks' hammers. The temple itself, however—the cell—was preserved intact and converted into a basilica of St Martin of Tours, in those days the most celebrated promoter of monasticism in the West. The altar, which most probably stood on the highest point of the mountain summit and which, before the building of the temple with a statue, may have been for a long time the only sanctuary of Cassino, was demolished. In its stead St Benedict built an oratory of St John the Baptist. The Saint very

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likely intended this chapel primarily for the use of the people, while the temple basilica of St Martin became, as we know for certain, the monastic church in which the monks celebrated their divine offices. The sacred groves of the gods, which were found annexed to this, as to all the great temples, the Saint burnt down. That they were dedicated to Venus and her cult, as later writers inform us, is not mentioned in the original sources. They belonged to the sanctuary of Apollo, into the possession of whose former magnificent inheritance, the poor and humble St Martin, monk and bishop, now entered. Under his protection, and that of the saintly Baptist, Benedict wished to found here anew his "school of divine service."

As significant of the beginning of monastic life on Monte Cassino Gregory the Great places strongly in the foreground the vigorous building activity of the monks, with which several miracles of St Benedict are incidentally connected.

We see how the brethren take out the earth and dig down deep, at the command of their abbot, in order to lay the foundations. While doing so, their spades disclose an idol of bronze, a relic no doubt of the former Roman colony. As the new buildings were to be erected within the precincts of the ancient acropolis, so they used first of all the materials already existing there. But it was only with great difficulty and at times only with the miraculous help

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of the Saint, that the monks were able to lift the enormous blocks of the stronghold and fit them into the new masonry. Gregory the Great also remarks occasionally that the walls were built of large rocks. For unskilled workmen the work must have been doubly difficult. Young monks of noble birth, who had never before handled a trowel or a plumb-line, stood on the scaffolding with the others. The wall on which they worked was far from being a masterpiece. The higher it rose the more it departed from the perpendicular, until at last there came a general and fearful collapse, which buried the son of the imperial magistrate in its ruins. The Saint's wonder-working prayer called back to life the brother whose crushed body had to be carried to him in a sheet, and soon after he was again busily occupied in helping to rebuild the work.

St Benedict seems to have been himself the architect, even as he later on appeared in a dream to the abbot of a community which had been sent from Cassino to make a foundation at Terracina, in order to show him where the oratory should be erected; where the brethren's refectory and where the house for the guests and the other buildings of the new monastery should be located. From this account of St Gregory it would appear that, at that time, the quadrangular plan of monastic buildings had not yet been adopted in the West, otherwise the indica-

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tions here enumerated for the new building would have been superfluous.

Happily, recent explorations of the topography of Monte Cassino have demonstrated that we can even now determine the position of several of the important buildings of that first monastic establishment, although scarcely a remnant of them has been preserved.

The entire precincts of the cloister were surrounded by the ancient citadel wall with its gate and towers. The entrance to this outer gate, the "porta vetus," as well as to the door of the monastery, was from the West, and not, as it is to-day, from the South. To the right of the door the new-comer espied the basilica of St Martin: the moment he entered the door he stood in front of the tower, which was designed to protect the entrance both to the church and the monastery. It overlooked, so St Gregory tells us, the whole monastic establishment. In its upper story St Benedict had his cell. Before the tower, with its end side probably adjacent to the door, stood the dormitory, the sleeping-room of the monks, with a balcony jutting out towards the West. This was the favourite place of the Saint, possibly because from there one got a view of the whole foreground of the monastery, as St Gregory on more than one occasion gives us to understand. According to later accounts the refectory seems to have been beside the dormitory. The guest quarters

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were between the "porta vetus" and the monastery.

We are not told anything about the extent of the monastic foundation at Monte Cassino. It would appear, however, from the large space which the building activity there has found in the *Dialogues* of Gregory the Great, that the edifices erected on it were much more imposing than those at Subiaco, where they so quickly resolved to abandon and locate elsewhere the three monasteries situated on the heights shortly after they were completed. Moreover, when St Benedict predicted the destruction of Monte Cassino to his friend Theoprobus he was able to say with evident emphasis: "This entire monastery which I have built and all that I have provided for the brethren is according to the Judgement of Almighty God given over to the heathen." From all these indications it would seem that Monte Cassino must have been from the very beginning a stately monastery.

Its glorious situation was not the least of its advantages. If one looked towards the west one's eyes rested for miles and miles on a fruitful plain, dotted with towns and villages. In the south the shining silver thread of the Liris was traceable through the green fields, which were bounded in the direction of Capua by a protruding chain of hills. On the other side of the monastic mount one looked out upon the magnificent range of the Apennines,

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which rises picturesquely in the north and east. And so St Benedict's foundation lay in a marvellous garden of paradise, far above the strivings of men and near to heaven and its peace. But the great monastery erected upon the ancient acropolis of Monte Cassino leads us to understand above all, that the organisation of monastic life had here received from the builder a grander character than it had in the wooden cells of Subiaco.

Perhaps the experiences which he derived from the monastic colony in the vale of the Anio, as well as his study of the Fathers, united with prayer and meditation, had already, even in Subiaco, ripened in his soul a perfect ideal of the monastic life, but the conditions established there hindered its realisation. This seems all the more credible as the Saint left the cherished place without hesitation, although the circumstances which moved him to leave it had at the last moment been suddenly altered in his favour. Is it not likely that he was glad of the opportunity to escape from the straitened situation to which so many considerations bound him in order to work out his ideal, without impediment on new ground? Undoubtedly the transition to Monte Cassino was a leading of divine Providence which enabled him to accomplish the purpose of his life. Then, the position of the place on an isolated height and yet on one of the most important roads of Italy at that time, may, quite of itself, have given occasion for the

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higher development, at least in exterior appearance, of the monastic establishment. As the monastic buildings grew only in the course of years into an harmonious whole, so the spiritual edifice of the monastic community, which they sheltered, as the Saint has traced it out in his Rule, developed only by degrees. At all events the Rule gives us the best idea of the monastic constitution which made Monte Cassino the first "Abbey" in the sense in which it subsequently became a model for the entire West.

But the Rule is not merely a witness to its constitution, it was its foundation. It was the fundamental law of the whole cloistral community life, which not only the monks but the abbot were obliged to obey. Of course, the abbot held an essentially different position, with regard to this all-dominating law, from that of the monks. He was its guardian and its interpreter: its application in each individual case depended upon his decision. He was therefore, although subject to the Rule, placed absolutely above his brethren, and that too by virtue of the Rule in which his position and his functions are minutely defined.

From the beginning the monarchical principle was the rule for the formation of cœnobitical monachism, whose first condition of existence is obedience. By Pachomius, the founder of the community form of monastic life in the valley of the Nile, the idea of authority is plainly expressed in the "Prin-

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ceps monasterii" (the Ruler of the monastery), and in the rigid military ordering of the fraternity. Basil, the classical erudite Hellenist, wished to establish the relation of master and disciple between the abbot and his monks. It was reserved for St Benedict the Roman to erect the whole structure of his monastic community clearly and distinctly on the principle of paternity.

To him the abbot is the representative of God from whom all paternity has its origin. He is the image of Christ, who has made the monks God's adopted children, and in whose name they are allowed to call their heavenly Father "Abba," Father! From this conception of the abbot originates his paternal authority, which extends to all matters internal and external. His first and greatest duty, in regard to which all others serve but as means to an end, is the direction of souls. It lays on the abbot the obligation of instructing his monks both by word and example, and it gives him also the right to admonish, reprimand and punish. Beside this pre-eminent office of pastor of souls, the abbot has likewise the supreme administration of the whole community in a similar way as in each well-ordered family the ruling of the household depends on the father. This care, however, must not so engross him as to hinder the perfect fulfilment of his principal duty, the saving of the souls of the brethren. On the other hand, the monks should also have an opportunity

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of manifesting their interest in the affairs of the monastery and of exercising an effective influence on the common welfare of the monastic family as becomes sons of the house. And thus the way in which the abbot administers his all-embracing office will at the same time give its character to the organisation of the community.

The truly patriarchal features of St Benedict's monastic ideal reveal themselves when any question of importance is to be decided. The abbot then gathers around him the entire monastic family, lays before them the business to be treated of and listens to every advice and every proposal offered to him by the monks. Each of them, to the very last and least, is free to give his opinion. The matter is considered in all its aspects, the reasons for and against are weighed, the final decision, however, does not rest with the brethren—for instance, by way of voting—but belongs solely and alone to the abbot, who, after conscientiously examining the views expressed, takes his resolution.

The foundation for the sole authority of the abbot in final decisions is simple and clear, and originates in the classic view of life held in early times. As it is the duty of the disciple to obey the master, so it is the duty of the latter to order everything well and justly. The counsel of the brethren is no law for the abbot, but a help to him in his fatherly cares, a sign of humble love for the monastic

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family. The written law, to which all in all things should be subject, "as to their mistress," is the holy Rule, the law of the house, and this must be considered in the counsels of the monks as well as in the decisions of the abbot.

In things, however, which are not exactly of supreme consequence, and yet of some importance, the abbot regarded the feeling of the community. But it is enough in such cases of minor interest to take counsel with the "seniors," the brethren who are advanced in age and, above all, excel in virtue and knowledge. They form in reality a standing senate, without in any way depriving the abbot of the possibility of consulting other monks also in certain circumstances. To this smaller council of the abbot formerly belonged the deans, who occasionally are called seniors: "whom the abbot may safely trust to share his burdens." To each of these a deanery or company of ten is assigned, which they are "carefully to direct in all things according to the commandments of God and the will of the abbot."

In Subiaco the whole monastic colony was divided, so to speak, into deaneries, each of which dwelt in a separate monastery with its own abbot. At Monte Cassino, however, all remained under the care of a single abbot, but to relieve him and to render possible the most far-reaching care, it was necessary to have a superior over every ten.

Besides these, deans and above them, it appears

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that thus early a præpositor or prior occupied the highest position of trust after the abbot in the monasteries of St Benedict. According to a well authenticated reading in a traditional manuscript of the *Dialogues* of St Gregory the Great, St Benedict, before leaving Subiaco, had given to each of his monasteries there a prior in addition to the abbot already established in them. In like manner the Saint nominated the deacon Servandus to be abbot of the monastery in Terracina, founded by the Patrician Liberius, " and him who was to be second to him—the prior."

With this custom, however, he must have had painful experiences. The priors boasted, so Benedict himself says, that they were appointed by the same superior as their abbots and pretended to have equal rights with them. And so parties were formed in the cloister. Some stood by the abbot, others supported the prior. The whole interior life of the monastery was thus shaken to its foundations. These happenings had strengthened the conviction in the abbot of Monte Cassino that it would be better to confide to the deans alone under his authority the entire administration of the community, and then no one would have occasion for becoming proud when the authority was distributed among several, who were all equally dependent on the abbot. But if weighty reasons told in favour of the appointment of a prior, and if the monastic

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community asked modestly for one, then each abbot might appoint one for his own monastery. Whether Monte Cassino itself had such a præpositor during the lifetime of St Benedict we cannot know for certain. In the later history of the order the prior has outlived the institution of deans, and in many monasteries bears at the present time the title of dean, as the only one of the original superiors over groups of ten who has survived.

The organisation of the monastic community was therefore very simple. The abbot was the father of the entire monastic family. If necessary, he had a representative and first official—the prior—by his side. Ordinarily, however, among every ten of the brethren "an older brother" or senior had a position of trust, both with regard to the abbot and the monks. The seniors, whose number was certainly not limited to the deans, formed the privy council of the abbot. The whole community, assembled under his presidency, formed the family council.

In principle the immediate and direct government of the community lay in the hands of the abbot as father of the family. As father of the house he had, in great things as in little, to take care of his spiritual sons and of his guests. But an extensive and many-sided establishment made it imperative to confide to trustworthy brothers the execution of these duties, whose management demanded for

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themselves alone the entire attention and capacity of one man.

Thus the whole material side of the monastic administration was entrusted to a house-master, the cellarer—master of the cellar. He had charge of the possessions and goods of the community, and had to provide for the sustenance and clothing of the brethren. The nursing of the sick, the care of the old and of the children, the reception and entertainment of the guests and charitable attention towards the poor, were likewise confided to him. But in order that he might be equal to his extensive duties, special brothers were allowed him for attending on the sick and looking after the guests; these exercised their functions, under his supervision, in the infirmary and guest-house. Besides, assistants were to be given to the cellarer if he wanted them. In all that concerned corporal necessities he was to be like a father to the whole community. But even he, to whom such a far-reaching activity was committed, was strictly enjoined not to make any arrangements without having an understanding with the abbot, who, in the last resort, had to bear all the responsibility for the administration of the cellarer which was carried on in his name.

In a smaller, but for the monastic family, most important circle, another senior was occupied: in his hands the abbot had placed the formation of the novices.

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In Subiaco, St Benedict, it would seem, took personal care of the instruction of the new-comers, who wished to join the monastic colony, even to the end of his sojourn there. Here at Cassino, however, when all the conditions had broadened out and where greater demands were made, from all sides, upon the abbot, he had appointed a novice-master. This senior, "who should be skilled in gaining souls," dwelt, with his novices, apart from the community in a separate house that had its own sleeping-room and its own refectory. He was to complete their preparation for formal entrance into the family circle in the course of a year. Constitutional regulations with regard to this preparation and particularly with regard to the act of their reception were laid down in detail.

The novice-master was obliged to read the monastic Rule three times to the candidate and to disclose and point out to him expressly the difficulties and hardships of the life that awaited him.

The first reading of the Rule took place two months after his entrance to the novitiate, just when he began to find his way about in his new world. After a further six months of quiet work and self-examination it was read to him a second time and again for the last time at the close of his year of probation. After each of these periods of instruction, which were at the same time filled up with practical exercises in the whole monastic life, the

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master had to say to his disciple: "Behold this is the law under which you desire to fight. If you are able to observe it, enter in, if not, freely depart." If the novice remained steadfast in his purpose to the last questioning he was allowed to take the monastic vows.

This solemn function was celebrated in the old temple basilica of St Martin, and consisted of two acts. The novice promised, in the first place, before God and the Saints and in presence of the whole community, perpetual stability in the monastic state, and especially in the monastic family of Monte Cassino, the observance of a virtuous life according to the Rule, and obedience to the abbot. This oral profession was made, as far as we are able to surmise, in the legal form of the Roman "stipulatio," or agreement, so that to the questions directed to him by the abbot concerning the three elements contained in his profession, with the words: "Do you promise?" the novice answered "Promitto," I promise. This religious and moral act by which the monk obligated himself in the first instance to God, was followed by a legal transaction, which bound him in a particular way to the community. He had to draw up a document with regard to the taking of his vows, using the form of petition then commonly employed, which he had to write with his own hand or, if he was unable to write, he had to acknowledge to it with his mark. This petition was addressed, with the mention of their names, to the Saints whose

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relics reposed in the church and who were regarded as the patrons and guardians of the church, and therefore at Monte Cassino to St Martin as well as to the abbot present, as head of the monastic family. After signing the document the novice placed it on the altar, wishing to express by this symbolic act that he was giving himself by his now legitimised vows to Christ.

The abbot, as Christ's representative, took the document from the altar and retained it in his possession to serve as a proof against the monk if he should at any time become unfaithful to his solemn promises. His worldly apparel was exchanged for the monastic habit. The Rule does not inform us whether the clothing of the monk was different, except in its simplicity, from the ordinary Roman costume. Judging from it the monks of Monte Cassino wore a tunic, which was made from undyed wool: it was fastened with a girdle. At work the monks put a scapular over their tunic: it was a garment for the shoulders similar to the pænula of later Roman times, which was worn by peasants and soldiers and which, according to the testimony of Paul the deacon, was in use among the country people around Monte Cassino as late as the time of Charlemagne. When they put off the scapular at the end of their work they put on the cowl, a large enveloping garment like a mantle with a hood. Their foot-wear was shoes and stockings such as the soldiers used in those days.

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None of the garments had any specific monastic character. Rather, since the advent of Hellenism to Rome, they had constituted the everyday clothing of the lower classes. And this corresponds with the statement in the Rule that the monks should not mind the colour or quality of the materials, they should simply follow the custom of the country and be content with what could be procured most cheaply. For a monk of noble family, the change of clothing evidently made a considerable and sensible difference from what he had hitherto been accustomed to.

The only sign that distinguished the monk abroad was the shorn head—the tonsure. St Benedict remarks in the first chapter of his Rule that unfaithful monks lie to God by their tonsure. The ancient monastic customs make it likely that in the first days of Monte Cassino the head of the novice was shorn at his clothing. Amid the chants and prayers of the brethren the incorporation of the new monk into the monastic family came to a close.

Monks from other monasteries might also be received into the community of St Benedict, provided they brought a written permission from their abbot and made a vow to remain in the Cassinese monastic family.

But there was still a third possibility of entrance into the community: the way of profession by proxy. It was in use for boys of tender age, who were offered to God in the cloister by their parents.

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In this case the father had to draw up the profession petition for his son, and had to wrap it along with the oblation of bread and the child's hand in the altar-cloth at the offertory of the Mass. Thus did he offer his boy as a sacrifice to God in the presence of witnesses. At a time when the children of the poor were, in the country, bound without exception to a manor-house, and, in the city, to a guild, the fact of being offered at the altar of a church or monastery was regarded as the greatest good fortune. For noble and free children the situation was different. In their case riches might be the ruin of their souls. Accordingly, their parents when offering them had to make in writing and under oath such a disposition of their children's property, that they later could have no further hope of gaining possession of it, lest the desire of riches might afterwards induce them to go back into the world. The parents, however, were entirely free to dispose as they pleased of the inheritance of their sons. If they wished to give it to the monastery they had to make a special deed of donation to that effect, in which they could, if they desired, reserve to themselves the income of it. From the text of the Rule it cannot be concluded for certain whether or not the boy was bound absolutely and for ever by this oblation. The Rule of St Basil, which gives the general practice of the Church, secures to the oblate a decisive choice between the cloister and the world when he came of age, and we see no imperative

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reason to interpret otherwise the views of St Benedict, although this has sometimes been done and not without harshness. It is worthy of observation that St Benedict wished these boys to be considered monks with full rights the moment they had obtained their fifteenth year. Very probably they then confirmed the oblation of their parents by their own voluntary consent.

The binding of a minor, whether it was done absolutely or conditionally, arose distinctly from the Roman idea of paternity which granted to a father the unlimited disposal of his children. According to the law of nature this inference rests on the supposition that parents will strive always and only for the best interests of their children. The contrary, though it so often actually occurs, is always regarded as an unnatural exception. According to the early Christian view supported by examples from the Old Testament the highest ideal of life was to belong, even from childhood, entirely to God. St Benedict, full of the noble enthusiasm for the faith that characterised the first Christian ages, embodied the ecclesiastical customs without change in the framework of his monastic constitutions, but he regulated his decisions concerning the rights of property with a view to the salvation of the oblates.

But, for the perpetuation of the monastic family, a settled method for the reception of new brethren was not enough. The constitutions must also regu-

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late the manner of providing successors for the abbatial office. In strictest dependence on the Roman ecclesiastical law, St Benedict enacted that the monastic community should elect their abbot from among themselves, and that each one of the brethren, even the last in the ranks, might be chosen father of the whole monastic family, if he had a praiseworthy life and doctrinal wisdom to commend him. As a first condition of the election, the Saint insists on unanimity, a principle of the early Church, which, down to the Middle Ages, retained its importance for the development of the canonical law of election. If this ideal, however, cannot be realised, the decision is to rest with the majority, but only when it makes choice of a worthy one. If they fail to do so, then the selection belongs to the minority, which expresses the desire of the best and wiser members—"pars sanior"—of the community, for a virtuous abbot in the sense of the Rule. But if it went so far that the entire community, falling into moral decadence, set over themselves an abbot who would concur in their unmonastic life, then the bishop, in whose diocese the abbey lay, or the abbots of neighbouring monasteries, or, in the absence of these, even the Christians of the vicinity, should interfere and not suffer the schemes of corrupt monks to triumph over justice. To prevent this the Saint gives to the parties above-named the full authority to provide for the monastery a worthy father. In case the greater number of the monks,

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or the whole community, should choose an unworthy candidate for their abbot, all those who co-operate in doing so lose their right of suffrage. The active right of election then passes to the minority or even to an authority outside of the community. The law of election thus framed by St Benedict is far from being mechanical. On the contrary, it establishes a norm full of life, which is equally well adapted to the patriarchal freedom of the family and to the ethical necessities of a monastic community.

The Rule therefore confers on all the brethren the active and passive rights of election, just as it admits all to the family council. The equality of right among the monks themselves, which results from this fundamental arrangement, is elsewhere more formally declared and placed in a still clearer light.

A privileged position which one or the other of them might have held in the world or in the Church, or seniority of age, were to give them no right of precedence. And yet, as in liturgical functions especially, a fixed order had to be established, St Benedict decided that precedence should be regulated by their earlier or later entrance into the cloister—since that was their birthday in the monastic family, and hence the one who entered at the first hour was to be considered older and senior to him who entered at the second hour. From this equality of rights among the monks is derived the principle of the Rule that no one, not even an official, may temporarily exclude his brother from the com-

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munity or chastise him, unless he has expressly received power from the abbot to do so. On the other hand, no one may shield or defend another against the superiors, even if that other be a blood relation, "because therefrom may arise the most grievous occasion of scandal." Therefore, no one should intrude himself, or arrogate to himself a right which does not belong to him, whether it be to the injury or to the utility of his brethren. Each one should rather respect the place assigned to his brethren in the monastic family circle by the abbot and thus safeguard the preservation of peace and of brotherly love.

In connection with this standard of universal equality, the abbot, who had full control of the ordering of the house, was at liberty to promote anyone as a reward for his merit and to degrade whom he pleased in punishment of a fault. Nevertheless the prior, the deans, the novice-master, priest and clerics had a place of honour even if, according to the time of their entrance, they were juniors to a great part of the community. The difference of rank thus accorded had to find expression also in the manner of their mutual address. The abbot was to be called by all "Lord" and "Abbot," not out of any pretensions of his own, but that Christ might thus be shown honour and love in His representative. Both these titles, Lord and Abbot, indicated in the strictest way the Roman conception of the father's authority over his household. As master of the

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house the ruler of a Roman household was called "Lord"; as head of the family he was called "paterfamilias," or father; in the monastic family, abbot. The two titles taken together designated, therefore, the fatherly ruler of the cloister—the house of God—as it is expressly called in the Rule. The older monks—probably because they were superiors—"priores"—addressed the younger ones as "brothers," and were themselves called "Rev. Fathers" by these latter.

These are the fundamental principles of the monastic constitutions of Monte Cassino. Developed as they are out of the idea of paternity, and always reducible to it again, they give the abbot his central position. They do not, indeed, make him a governor who stands outside the circumference of the community and opposite to it, but the centre of the family circle which groups itself in perfect order, yet confidently, around him. It may here be said that the juridical element to which we have, in this chapter, primarily directed our attention, is always pervaded by a warm and fatherly tone in the setting which Benedict gives it. Many, perhaps most, of the elementary portions of his Rule are borrowed from the old monastic tradition, like the deans, the prior and the cellarer, but they are inserted into the new organism with greater freedom and independence according to the conception of their functions evolved by his own labour. The discussion over the office of prior is a sufficient evidence of this. Other

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elements of the constitution, such as the two-fold council of the abbot, the juridical character of the profession, and especially the vow of stability in the monastic community, as well as the written attestation of the making of the vows, are Benedict's own work. They contribute unmistakably not only to strengthen the exterior family tie, but to draw its inner bonds more perfectly around the abbot. Certainly in constituting the monastic family as the native soil of the new and rising monachism of the West, the clear-seeing, calmly weighing, and exactly formulating genius of the Roman law has manifested itself prominently in St Benedict's Rule. In the course of our sketch we shall have occasion to demonstrate this more in detail on particular points. Let it suffice as a preliminary to have traced in its outlines the design which the efficient labour of the abbot of Monte Cassino completes in detail.

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The Father

NO other title gave a greater fullness of rights among the Romans than that of paternity. Livy and other Roman writers have designated paternity an abridgment of "majestas patria." According to the letter of the law, the father was an unlimited autocrat in his own family. The mother, however, did not thereby forfeit her rights, for the Roman ought to be to his own as a father full of self-devotion, gentleness and love. And in Rome the affectionate father—"pius pater"—was undoubtedly held in high honour. In the very first words of his Rule St Benedict makes it evident that the efficiency of the abbot should not be gauged by the legal paternity derived from the notions of ancient paganism, but by the moral conception of fatherhood peculiar to Christendom. Therefore the Prologue to his Rule begins: "Hearken, O my son, to the precepts of thy master, and incline the ear of thy heart: receive with joy and faithfully fulfil the admonition of thy loving Father." From all that his pen has written about it and from what his biographer relates of him, it

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amply appears how completely the Saint himself realised the high ideal of a spiritual father towards his sons.

A leading motive with him was St Augustine's word to the superiors of a convent: "It is better to provide than to preside, to be loved than to be feared."

In order to make it possible for the monks to dedicate themselves entirely to God and to His representative, the abbot was invested with unlimited authority. God and the Judgment to come, in which He will exact the strictest account from the abbot of all his orderings, are the sovereign principles that govern the abbot. But, if an unlimited fullness of power was not to become a peril for those subject to it, its administration had to be bound up with ideal, moral principles. The master should be the servant of all. Instead of fear, love must sow and harvest. Along with the power of office, paternal love should determine his relations towards the brethren. Thus only could a living and familiar intercourse between the abbot and his monks be rendered possible. But that this ideal is not attainable without hindrances and difficulties, the Saint knew full well. He was perfectly aware of the multiplicity of individualities, both spiritual and moral, with which the abbot has to reckon. His Rule occasionally notes the most various types of character. The perfect disciples, who may some-

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times even address a word of edification to their brethren, the energetic and those with lofty aims, the prudent and the docile, the gentle, the patient, the humble and the obedient are the consolation and the joy of the abbot. But his sympathetic care is concerned more with the difficult characters than with these. Among such characters we find despondent and doubting souls, silly, unstable, indifferent and superficial natures, idle and frivolous talkers, restless heads and pretentious critics, hard-hearted and proud monks, surly and malicious contemners of monastic discipline, rebellious, stubborn and obstinate elements.

To all of them the paternal heart of the abbot must belong. He has to adapt himself to the personal peculiarities of each of his monks. Observation and experience, but, above all, love for his spiritual sons, made St Benedict a teacher and an educator, whose guiding principle was the individual treatment of different characters. For well-disposed monks the instruction of the abbot is sufficient to keep them steady in their holy conversation, and his encouraging words alone will incite them to strive after higher perfection. If they now and then forget themselves, an admonition or a reproof sufficed to recall them, make them acknowledge their fault and do better. But the example of the abbot, according to the conviction of Benedict, will make an impression upon both narrow minds and hard natures.

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Therefore reprimands are necessary for frivolous persons. Stripes and other corporal penances may eventually be required to reduce to humble submission those who, in obstinacy and pride, rebel against the monastic law and against their superiors. Out of these pedagogical rules grew the whole criminal code, which occupies not a little space in the law-book of the abbot of Monte Cassino. Originally it seems to have been a special codex for the superiors, and particularly perhaps for the deans: which was later incorporated into the Rule as the sanction of community life. The Rule itself refers often to this primitive code as the "disciplina regularis"—the regular discipline. Even in this severe codex of monastic discipline we detect the delicate, psychological mind of St Benedict, who, even when he is obliged to punish, remains ever the teacher and the father. This indicates clearly the high supernatural standpoint from which he viewed things.

Not all the possible faults that may arise from momentary forgetfulness, from unconscious infirmity and from thoughtless haste, and which may happen to the best, find a place in this codex—as is the case, to some extent, in the Rule of St Columban—but only those which first of all proceed from an evil disposition of the will and which for that reason are generally to be regarded as grievous faults. The stubborn, the disobedient, the haughty grumbler

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and the contemner of the Holy Rule and of superiors —these are the ones against whom punitive justice must be employed, if they are not to become a downright danger to the moral well-being of the monastic community. But how discreetly they must be proceeded against! Once, and yet a second time, they must be admonished secretly. At these private interviews the opportunity is naturally given them of explaining or excusing their conduct. But if such a monk transgresses a third time he must be admonished openly before all the brethren. The presence of the brethren is, at the same time, for the guilty one a silent disapproval of his behaviour on the part of the whole community. He must be given to understand that he has placed himself in opposition, not only to his abbot, the shepherd of his soul, and the guardian of order in the cloister, but likewise to his brethren. He has become a stranger among those who " truly seek God."

Should this knowledge not move him to better his ways, then he who has already severed himself morally from the united spirit of the community must now be actually deported from it. He is excommunicated. He is excluded from participation in the Eucharistic Sacrifice, from Holy Communion and from the choral chanting of the Psalms : nor is he allowed to share the common table of the brethren. During the celebration of the divine office in the oratory he kneels in silence at the oratory

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door, and when the office is ended he prostrates himself on the ground at the feet of the monks as they come out. His food, over which no blessing is to be pronounced, he takes by himself. No one may speak to him. Whoever dares to transgress this prohibition by conversing with the excommunicated brother is to be condemned to a similar if somewhat milder punishment.

Thus cut off from all spiritual and familiar relations with the community, and left severely to himself before the door of the sanctuary and at his solitary work, the unfaithful brother must become conscious of his fault. Salutary sorrow and penance must tame his pride and soften his hard heart. The longing for the holy chants of the choir, for the blessings and great joys of the monastic family circle, will move him to sincere submission and serious change of conduct.

Though outwardly he is separated from the monastic family, he is still in touch with it. The hands of his brethren are folded in united prayer for him and an eye watches him with anxious love, the eye of his abbot and father. This St Benedict most insistently commands. Following the example of the Good Shepherd, the abbot must draw near to his erring son with soothing gentleness and bring him back to true conversion and to happy reunion with the community. But if the offence of the excommunicated monk were directed against the abbot

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himself, so that he might see in his superior only his personally interested enemy, or if on other grounds it is to be feared that a direct appeal of the abbot to the guilty one would be fruitless, the abbot must then out of generous love for the straying soul impose on himself a humble reserve, and send to him, instead, experienced and sympathetic brothers, to lighten his humiliation, comfort him with kindness and gently lead him back to the arms of the shepherd and the shelter of the true fold. Thus must the abbot and the brethren exert themselves to win back the imperilled souls to God and to their own happiness.

Doubtless the tender contact of fatherly and brotherly love, like the warming rays of the spring sun, will break through the dark clouds of the painful rigour of penance and cause a true conversion of heart to spring up. How gladly will pardon be accorded to the penitent. But, at the command of the abbot, he must ask it on his knees of him and of all the brethren, and he must solicit their expiating prayers. Admission to the family fellowship is now granted to him, but even with that he has not yet recovered the full title to his former rights. He has first to pass through a transient state of partial forgiveness. Thus by his excommunication he has lost the place or rank which belonged to him by the seniority of his profession. The abbot may place him in a lower or possibly the last place. Nor is he

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yet permitted, at the liturgical divine service, to represent the body of the choir by the intoning of a Psalm, or the reading of a holy lesson. In these we may recognise the ecclesiastical office of the psalmist or the lector, for the performance of which he must await the special permission of the abbot. As long as the suspension lasted he was obliged, at the end of each hour of prayer, to cast himself on the ground in the place where he was allowed to stand in choir and thus publicly make satisfaction. At last the abbot absolved him from this penance, and thus, after a long and severe purification, he again entered the community as a member with full rights.

This most important chapter of the penal law of St Benedict, which contemplates not only the just expiation of grievous faults, but much more the interior conversion of the culprit, is in substance copied entirely from the penitential canons of the early Church. We feel as if we met on Monte Cassino the very same picture which Tertullian has painted of the penitents of the third century: "They prostrate themselves on the ground in the porch of the basilica to humble themselves; they fortify their prayers with fasting, they sigh and weep day and night, they embrace the knees of the priests and commend their petitions to all the brethren" (De Pænitentia 9). "They fall at the feet of the priests, they touch the hem of their garments, they kiss the traces of their footsteps and take hold of

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their knees imploring pardon and the imposition of hands" (De Pudicitia 15). But we are also reminded of the "audientes," or "hearers," to whom, after a first pardon, there was conceded a limited participation in the divine service. Some penitential exercises with regard to the monastic life and cloister liturgy have undergone a change. Thus an analogy is indicated between the reducing of the penitent from the society of the faithful into the ranks of the catechumens and the monk's descent to the lowest place in the ranks of his brethren. The "pardon" and the "blessing" of the abbot, for which Cassian uses the ordinary term "reconciliation," were similarly taken from the penitential discipline of the church. This act of pardoning had also in the cloister probably found its liturgical expression in the ceremony of the laying on of hands.

An assimilation of the monastic penitential discipline to the penitential practice of the ancient Church took place as a matter of course with the gradual formation of cœnobitical monachism. Macarius, Pachomius, and Cassian, had, especially in this respect, already prepared the way for St Benedict. Receding, however, from the general usage of the Church, monachism had, at an early date, even in its Oriental home, received into its penitential code corporal punishment and stripes with a rod. St Benedict had likewise retained this means of punishment of the traditional cloistral law, as a

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last resort, to use his own expression, for such monks as are insensible to moral punishment, which touches only the life of the soul. For them excommunication is not a grievous penance; they must be roused from their selfish indolence by a rougher hand. At the time of the decline of the Roman Empire, when moral barbarism manifested itself even among monks, as at Vicovaro, and when barbarian lack of culture had already crossed the threshold of the cloister, as at Subiaco, corporal punishments were unavoidable, at least in exceptional cases. The frequency and severity with which they manifest themselves soon after in German cloister life, bear witness as well to their necessity in the age of the migration of the nations as to the measured severity of the father of monks of Monte Cassino.

It might happen, however, that neither the excommunication nor the corporal punishment could bring the guilty one to penance and amendment. They might even have the contrary effect of confirming the rebellious spirit and the hardened heart still more in haughty resistance to every influence on the part of the superior. Have the guilty not gone so far in their rebellion at times as to defend their conduct and accuse the abbot of injustice? The language of St Benedict leads us to believe that he himself was not spared such painful experiences. Once more the indulgent father, even in this extremest danger to his authority and the well-being of the

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community, endeavours, like a wise physician, to make use of all imaginable remedies. Comforting exhortation, moving admonitions, references to the word of God in Holy Scripture, with its consolations and its fearful seriousness, might bring the obdurate one to his senses. Excommunication and stripes may once more pierce him with burning pain, but more powerful than all these remedies is that of prayer, which the Saint has recourse to and which the whole monastic family must offer in common for the degenerate brother, after the manner of the Christian community, which in the Mass of catechumens implores God aloud for the conversion of public penitents. If even this sublime proof of faith and brotherly love does not touch the heart of the refractory brother, then the poisoned and swollen member is to be amputated to preserve the health of the whole organism. The diseased sheep must be driven from the flock, lest the whole herd become tainted. The temporary separation from the common life of the community becomes now the final expulsion from the monastery.

It would be a fundamental misconception of the mind of St Benedict to believe that a monk thus expelled could possibly be received back into the monastery. It is true that the Saint goes so far as to allow the cloister doors to be opened three successive times to an unstable brother. But this happens, as the authentic text of the Rule testifies,

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only in the case of one who leaves of his own accord. It may be that timidity and despondency or a sudden unpremeditated mental upset has determined him to go away. In the life of St Benedict we have a typical example. Weary of a monk's continuous and oft-repeated petition for dismissal, the Saint at last most unwillingly gave the fickle subject leave to depart. But scarcely had he, who was so eager for liberty, turned his back on the towers of Monte Cassino, when the world with its dangers revealed itself to him in the form of a terrible monster which rushed upon him with open mouth. "Help, brother, help," he cried, "a dragon seeks to devour me." Mortal anguish forced the cry from him, and with quickened step he hurried back again to the sheltering walls of the monastery. To the converted the door was compassionately opened. But even such as acknowledged their stupidity, who repented and sincerely promised amendment, were only to be received, when they returned, into the last place in the ranks of the brethren. Never, however, could return be granted to one on whose insolence and contempt all the love and even the humility of the abbot had been wasted in vain. If the rough ways of the world ultimately led him to penance, God's mercy would provide him elsewhere with an asylum. He could never return to his own community without injuring the ideal family spirit, or, if he returned once, then not more

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than once. The words "aut projecitur"—or "is cast out"—which would allow even those who had been expelled as incorrigible to "be taken back until the third time," were added later to the original text of St Benedict's Rule.

This extreme penalty of expulsion from the monastery, in the interest of the community, not even the prior if rebellious should escape. A monk who was also a priest was equally subject to this final sentence, if the bishop who had imposed ordaining hands upon him had likewise endeavoured fruitlessly to bring about his conversion. Whenever St Benedict speaks, however, of the excluding of one of his sons from the paternal home, one feels the deep anguish of soul with which he writes the sentence. To him it is as a sentence of death, a sentence almost of eternal damnation. Ever new degrees of admonitions and punishments seem to delay the last word: nothing but the bitterest necessity, fear for the salvation of the brethren, could induce him to say it.

In order to obviate as far as possible this misfortune, the greatest that can befall the abbot and the community, and, above all, the erring monk himself, lighter transgressions were likewise to be visited with punishment. It is just these first beginnings of faults contrary to the Rule, and abuses, that St Benedict wishes to resist energetically. But, even here, mildness goes hand in hand with severity. The fundamental idea of the penitential discipline of the

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early Church is his model for the monastic penitential system.

Next to the union of the soul with God by sanctifying grace, there is no greater blessing for a Christian than to belong to the Church, the mystical body of the Redeemer. It is really the pledge of our union with God. Whoever is deprived of the "peace" of the Church is separated from God, and the more the bishop restricts the living fellowship of the Church for Christians, the more strongly does he emphasise the outward estrangement of sinners from God, only, of course, in order to bring them back more securely to the fountain of their life. It is this high conception, drawn from the idea of the communion of saints, that guides St Benedict.

From the beginning of cœnobitical life the community and the cloister have been the monk's acknowledged circle of ecclesiastical peace. The incorrigible contumacious contemners of the Rule are for ever excluded from the brotherhood. Grievous offences against the commandments of God or against the essential laws of the cloister are punished with temporary but entire denial of this "peace": that is, with excommunication from the liturgical life and fraternal intercourse. For minor faults against monastic principles or against the common rule of life, the monk is not deprived of participation in the liturgical life of the community, but his share in the family life is diminished. He is not permitted

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to take his meals with the brethren, but receives them an hour later and partakes of them alone. There is nothing to indicate that any portion of his food should be withheld from him. His punishment rather consists in the fact that access to the common table, the love feast of the brethren, is denied him. Here also the connection between the fellowship of the monastic table and the celebration of the liturgy is accentuated by the prescription of the Rule that those who are excommunicated from the refectory are obliged to perform a suitable penance in the basilica during the divine service. They must forgo the privileges of intoning a Psalm or an Antiphon, or reading a lesson, until pardon is vouchsafed them by the abbot. In like manner those who come late to the divine office or to table, inasmuch as these are the most important common exercises of monastic community life, are punished by a partial excommunication. Whoever has been reproved three times for coming late, is forbidden to share the common table and must do without his portion of wine.

From the punishment of the greater and lesser excommunication St Benedict clearly distinguishes the "satisfactions"; for although they too are intended for expiation and amendment, yet in their essential character they are rather a petition for pardon expressed through humiliation. Hence we find satisfaction required even after the completion

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of a penance in order to obtain forgiveness of a fault. It seems almost as if the penance were an atonement given directly to God, while the satisfaction was, above all, a means of securing reconciliation with the abbot and the monastic family.

The picture which the Acts of the Apostles draws of the inner life of the original Christian community in Jerusalem, namely, that "continuing daily with one accord in the temple and breaking bread from house to house they took their meat with gladness and simplicity of heart" (ii. 46), was renewed in the cloisters of the cœnobite monks. The Eucharistic Sacrifice and Communion, enveloped by the incense of the liturgical praises of God in the basilica, found their prototype in the Agape of the cœnaculum sanctified by holy silence. This is confirmed by the eucharistic character which has been pointed out in the prayers before and after meals of the ancient Greek monks, which are still echoed perceptibly in the blessings of the table of Western monasticism. And so it was particularly at the common family meal that the spirit of a closer fellowship was diffused through all the members of the community. The ceremony of washing the feet, which the outgoing and incoming servers at table had to perform every Saturday on all the brethren, indicates as much. The thought of the Last Supper of our Divine Redeemer, with its holy mysteries, should take hold of the monks at that solemn moment and serve them

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as a humble preparation for the Blessed Eucharist and the Agape which united them in heart and soul. The table reader, too, begs the prayers of the brethren in intimate connection with the Eucharistic Sacrifice and Communion.

The austere conception of ancient monachism admitted of but one meal each day, the "cœna," or principal meal of the Romans, which was taken in the evening, originally after sunset. The "prandium," or dinner, is an alleviation which St Benedict freely allows his disciples for the summer, chiefly out of consideration of their work in the fields during harvest time. In his prescriptions with regard to food and drink the Saint unites the severity of the ascetic with the mildness of a father. The needs of the brethren are to be fully and entirely provided for. On particular occasions, above all, when there is heavy work on hand, the abbot may grant an addition. Benedict even allows a pint ("hemina") of wine daily to each monk, although he would prefer if his sons abstained entirely from it. This abstention would bring them a special reward from God. The desire to provide his subjects abundantly with everything necessary, guided him in all these arrangements; yet, at the same time, it made him withhold from them whatever could possibly imperil the serious spirit of Christian moderation. And thus the Saint in his minute regulations about the clothing and bedding, while generously

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departing from the ancient customs, would tolerate nothing superfluous. In doing so the father of monks keeps always before his eyes a tender consideration for every manner of human weakness.

" The care of the sick comes before all things and above all things. They are to be served as Christ Himself, who is in very deed served in them, for He has said: 'I was sick and you visited Me,' and 'what you have done unto one of these least ones you have done unto Me' (Matt. xxv. 36 and 40). Let it be the chief concern and a matter of conscience with the abbot to see that the sick are not neglected in any way." These are the principles with which Benedict introduces his prescriptions for the care of the sick brethren. A separate cell is to be placed at their disposal and a God-fearing, diligent and careful brother is to be appointed to wait on them. The use of baths and of fresh meat is likewise allowed to them.

" Old people and children, two stages of life with which Nature itself is drawn to sympathise," are equally regarded with delicate indulgence. In the matter of food they are not to be bound to the full severity of the Rule and may partake of it an hour earlier than the specified time. But with all that, no occasion must ever be given to relaxation or effeminacy. " The sick themselves, however, should remember that they are served for the love of God, and that therefore they should not grieve the

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brethren who serve them, with unnecessary demands. Still, the attendants must deal indulgently with the impatient, because a greater reward of virtue is derived from them. As soon as the sick have regained their health they should abstain from meat in the accustomed manner." In the same way boys and young monks must not be spoiled by soft treatment. If they have been guilty of any fault and are as yet unable to understand the greatness of the penalty of excommunication they are to be punished by severe fasting and sharp stripes, in order that they may be cured.

"The severity of a master and the tenderness of a father" thus appear everywhere united. It must likewise be said that it was certainly no domineering and severe ideal, but an earnest and vigorous character, that passed from the Roman conception of "majestas patria"—paternal authority—into the fatherly conception of the Benedictine Rule.

As Benedict threatened the disobedient that all-subduing death would be their avenging punishment, so there runs through his whole law-book an energetic tone, which admits of no contradiction. Obedience is the touchstone of discipleship. Whoever is found perfect in that is worthy of greater love from the abbot, otherwise he must show equal love to all. But as this love rests upon the appreciation of the inner worth of the monks, and therefore increases or diminishes correspondingly, Benedict

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exacted from the brethren a respectful love for their abbot.

This he expressed sharply on a certain occasion, as is related in his life. One evening the son of a "defensor," an official of inferior grade, but belonging to a class of functionaries that often possessed great influence in the government, was holding the light for the Saint at supper. The young monk, who was formerly accustomed to be waited upon himself, and was still strongly dominated by the external things of life, soon began with increasing ill-will to follow the bent of his thoughts, which were full of the haughtiness of nobility: "Who is this by whose side I have to stand and wait upon? To whom have I to hold the candle and perform the service of a slave? And who am I?" The quiet and observing old man had read enough in the flaming eyes of his hot-blooded disciple. "Make the sign of the Cross on your heart, brother," he said to him suddenly. "Make the sign of the Cross on your heart. What sort of conversation are you holding therein?" He immediately ordered the light to be taken out of his hand and commanded him to sit down and be silent.

"Sign your heart, brother!" How admirably St Gregory has characterised the trend of St Benedict's thoughts. It is not personal resentment and irritability that speaks in these words, but sorrow for the state of his disciple's soul. The paternal love

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of the Saint was the love of a shepherd; not consideration for his own person, and the sanctification and true happiness of those who had placed themselves under his direction, was the exclusive motive of his conduct. "The abbot," so he writes, "should bear in mind that he hath undertaken the charge of weak souls and not a tyranny over the strong." Therefore it is that in his Rule "equitas"—equity, is especially emphasised. The judge must observe it when he applies the law in a particular case. To it the Roman jurisprudence owes its beauty and its permanent importance even in our own days for human civilisation. God, before whose judgment-seat the abbot will one day stand, is his pattern ("the most just Judge," cap. iii.), and equity plainly requires that greater severity should sometimes be applied—"according to the dictates of equity" (Prol.).

There are, of course, infirmities of the soul, which can only be healed by a painful effort. Accordingly, St Benedict does not hesitate to admonish the abbot with the proverbs of Holy Scripture: "Strike thy son with the rod and thou wilt deliver his soul from death." However, if the picture of the late Middle Ages from Andrea di Cione Orcagna (who died about 1368) places a rod in the hand of the Saint, it proves only that in those days men no longer appreciated the far-reaching spirit of the law-giver of Monte Cassino. It was merely to the spiritually insensible, who, after

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all, must be brought to understanding and amendment, that he thought of applying the rod. But the ideal of an abbot and father ever present to his mind was that of an indefatigable guardian and director of souls, full of friendly encouragement, gentle admonition and joyful self-sacrifice: and we find on more than one page of the Holy Rule the favourite image of the ancient Church, the Good Shepherd, as the highest realisation of this ideal.

The abbot should imitate the touching example of the Good Shepherd who left His obedient sheep on their mountain pasture in order to go after the one that had strayed and, full of compassion for its weakness, to bear it back on His own sacred shoulders to the flock. As nothing seemed more objectionable to the Saint than degenerate monks—a flock without a shepherd—the Sarabaites—who are not enclosed in the Lord's sheepfolds, so he knows no more grievous fault of the cœnobites than to withdraw themselves disobediently from their shepherd. The abbot must ever remember with fear the inspection of the flock by the heavenly Father of the household. If the Lord finds any lack of profit in His sheep, He will hold the shepherd responsible for it. But if the sheep have not responded to the diligence of their shepherd, then in the Judgment the shepherd will escape without blame and punishment, but the sheep shall be condemned to death. The abbot must therefore watch zealously

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over his sheep, but he must not fatigue them overmuch, lest they succumb. He must not lose any of them. And yet he must take great care lest a single mangy sheep should infect the whole herd. Such an one must be excluded. Thus should the shepherd devote himself lovingly to all who follow his pastoral staff, so that he may not have to complain of any loss in the flock entrusted to him, but may rather rejoice in beholding their increase.

This fatherly fidelity on the part of the shepherd reaps its most bountiful harvest in the unlimited confidence of the monks. They open the whole world of their souls to the abbot and receive from him in return comfort, counsel, encouragement and direction. In this contact of soul with soul, the abbot becomes to each monk a father and a friend, and that compassion which St Benedict looks for in a shepherd of souls will often become the strongest bond between father and son. And thus the dearest wish of the Saint's heart, that no one should be saddened in the House of God, will be fulfilled to perfection. He wants them all to be happy. Thus, too, is developed that ideal of the monastic family which he has embodied in the last chapter but one of his Rule, in the following words: "Let the monks in honour prefer one another: let them most patiently endure one another's infirmities, whether of body or mind, and vie with each other in obedience. Let no one follow what

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he considers useful for himself, but rather what seemeth good for another. Let them cherish fraternal charity with chaste love: fear God from a motive of love: love their abbot with sincere and humble affection and prefer nothing whatever to Christ, and may He lead us all alike to life everlasting."

With St Benedict love occupied the highest place: it dictated the Rule to him. Whatever severity may be found in it was solely intended for the protection and conserving of charity in the cloister. It was love that made of the father a lawgiver.

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The Lawgiver

IN that epoch of mighty changes which transformed a persecuted Church into a dominating power, many divinely guided souls aspired after solitude far from the haunts of men. In caverns and huts they strove after that martyrdom for Christ, which the world no longer offered them. And so there sprang up amid the burning sands of the Egyptian desert a new source of power and of heroic love of the Saviour.

Soon an established standard of life was fashioned for these settlers, who had withdrawn themselves from the world. The first Fathers initiated the inquiring new-comers, who walked in their footsteps and followed their manner of life. In the beginning this was done orally, as masters initiate their pupils. Slowly, however, the doctrine of the ancient Fathers was written down and collected. Then, after the time of Pachomius, when the monks were gathered together in monastic communities, prescriptions for regulating the common life came to be added to these earlier maxims for striving after virtue. Thus monastic rules supple-

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mented the monastic teachers. And when Oriental monachism was in the course of developing in the West, it followed a similar process. For Western monachism John Cassian, the highly cultivated abbot of Marseilles, became the original theoretical master. By his side, as its lawgiver, stands Benedict of Nursia. Cassian's works on *Monastic Institutions* and his *Conferences of the Fathers*, were Benedict's text-books. The whole ideal Oriental monachism was familiar to him. He had even begun his career by striving after the highest ideal of the eremitical life in the cave of Subiaco: but when forced to leave his solitude and to come in contact with other monks the catastrophe of Vicovaro showed the abyss that opened between theory and practice. From that moment all his efforts were bent towards realising the ideal in practical life.

For his monastic colony in the valley of the Anio he created by slow development a Rule of life, which, emancipating itself more and more from Oriental methods, grew up out of local circumstances and reached its full maturity on Monte Cassino. This monasticism, born of Western spirit and life, could and must be realised. Accordingly, St Benedict wrote for his disciples not a manual of doctrine but a book of law. Precepts, not theories, were needed. The solid foundation on which Benedict based his law was the doctrine of Cassian.

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But it is marvellous how far the Roman has outstripped the work of the Gaul, in independence and clearness of thought.

Corresponding to the triple renunciation of the devil, his works and his enticements, made in baptism, there had originated a triple renunciation in the monastic life also, as a line of progressive development. Cassian, who speaks repeatedly of these renunciations, characterises them in one instance briefly as follows: the first consists in despising all the riches and possibilities of pleasure afforded by the world and forsaking them bodily. The second leads us to detest our former habits of life, along with our failings and (inordinate) inclinations of soul and body. The third renunciation is directed against all present and visible things: by means of it we succeed in henceforth thinking only of the future and in contemplating the invisible.

These three renunciations were therefore called by the ancient writers "conversationes"—manners of life—or "conversiones"—conversions. Thus we have the first stage of conversion—from the worldly to the monastic life; the second, an interior conversion from sin to virtue, from moral weakness to perfection; while the third reaches the transformation of the whole man, lifting him from created things to the contemplation of God.

St Benedict makes only incidental mention of the first conversion—that is the leaving of the world

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and entering the cloister—but he mentions it repeatedly and with great seriousness. He speaks of it without using the term " first conversion," when he ordains that to him, who desires to be admitted to the monastic life, entrance should not be made easy. Without the permission of the abbot a monk may not speak with his relations and friends nor accept presents or letters, nor talk to the guests. Neither is he allowed to dine with people of the world. Strict seclusion, personal poverty, and the vow of constant perseverance in the monastic community belong to this first conversion. In the Prologue to his Rule he speaks of the divine voice that calls the workman from the market-place of worldly life to the vineyard of God.

As to the third conversion, or contemplation, he merely alludes to it as the summit of perfection, to which the Holy Scriptures, the lives of the Fathers, the works of Cassian and the Rule of St Basil, ought to lead the monk. The soul and the summit of perfection is to Benedict, as to John, Paul, Basil and Augustine, love itself—" caritas perfecta." He clearly describes the way to it in his chapters on the tools of virtue: obedience, silence and humility (4-7). The ideal on which these chapters are founded he does not describe, only the foundation-stones are visible. But it is more than certain that it is connected with the third conversion. At all events, his ideal was free from unhealthy

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intellectualism and spiritualism. Decisive was his refusal of the eremitical life. Benedict recognised that the time for individual anchoritism had passed, and that the monastic community as a whole had to incorporate the idea of the anchorite. Therefore the height of perfection—"culmina perfectionis"—in his eyes must have been a pure cœnobitical perfection, a height of contemplation, a strength, unselfishness, and purity of love, that can only be attained by a monastic community. The execution of this only intimated third conversion in its details is left to the teaching of the abbot, holy reading, and divine grace.

He himself—and in this he shows himself the Occidental and the keen-sighted Roman—dedicates his entire Rule to the second form of conversion, which he makes the subject of a special vow under the name of conversion of manners—"conversio morum"—or, as the original text reads, monastic progress in virtue—"conversatio morum."

Of the three vows already mentioned, that of persevering constantly in the monastic community is mentioned a few times as the essential postulate of the monastic life. A special chapter is devoted to obedience, and on several occasions particular mention is made of it. But to the vow of conversion of manners the entire content of the Rule belongs so exclusively that it may be unhesitatingly called the vow of observing the Rule. Stability and obedi-

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ence are the most important means to secure and facilitate the realisation of this conversion of manners which is the principal element in the Benedictine Rule. What St Benedict aimed at is clear. He did not want a surfeit of ideals, which, without solid formation of character, leads to self-deception and ends in opposite extremes, such as he had become acquainted with at Vicovaro. He wanted rather that the monk should keep working morally on himself, and thus form a profound interior life, which, with ever-increasing purity of heart, would blossom out into a high and ardent love of God.

This practical and moral aim has made St Benedict the father of Western monachism. Again, it is indicative of the Roman and of Benedict's juridical way of thinking that his new order grew up on the basis of monastic ideals and that the community idea distinguishes and dominates the whole arrangement of the Holy Rule.

The Prologue receives the new-comer with an exposition of the call of grace under whose spell he finds himself, shows him that admission to the earthly and heavenly tabernacle of Christ our King is the aim of the new life, and lays before him the fundamental notion of a fellowship of vocation or school for the service of God. This fellowship is not to be a colony of hermits, nor a loose union of a few after the manner of the degenerate Sarabaites and Girovagi,* but a

* "Vagrant monks."

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strict family community of cœnobites, of monks who live together under a Rule and an abbot (cap. i.). The head of the community is an abbot (cap. ii.), who, however, in weighty matters, allows the whole community a consulting participation in his administration, and in his less important affairs, the seniors (cap. iii.). From the constitutional rights of the community, the lawgiver goes on to its spiritual construction. The Christian moral law, beginning with the Ten Commandments, forms the elemental groundwork of the monastic life. Its precepts, which are here condensed into a collection of sentences similar to the sermons for catechumens of the Early Church, constitute the "Instruments" that are placed in the hands of the monk for the practice of his spiritual art (cap. iv.). In the workshop of the cloister he must labour, in obedient submission to the abbot (cap. v.), and in silent recollection, at his own sanctification (cap. vi.), which has its beginning and ending in true humility and its perfection and fruit in the pure love of God (cap. vii.). By this means that spiritual atmosphere is attained which enables the community to perform its highest duty, the celebration of the holy liturgy in the sight of God and His angels (caps. viii.-xx.). After two digressions concerning the activity of the deans in the community (cap. xxi.) and the ordering of the dormitory of the monks (cap. xxii.), a penitential code is estab-

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lished for the ensuring of regular life in the community (caps. xxiii.-xxx.). In a long series of chapters, by far the greatest part of the Rule is now taken up with the regulation of the general monastic administration (xxx.-lvii.). The community is thus consolidated and its inner life set in order. The next question is to maintain it and to provide for the reception of new members (lviii.-lxi.) Two further digressions with reference to the aforenamed prescriptions, and laying down rules with regard to the priesthood and the order of rank to be observed in the cloister, are followed by explanation of the points of view that have to be considered in the choosing of a new head (lxiv.) and in the appointment of his representative (lxv.). In the chapter on the porter (lxvi.) an enclosure wall so to speak is erected around the community's place of retreat—the cloister—and with this chapter ends the original structure of the Rule. The remaining chapters (lxvii.-lxxiii.) form a supplement added by the holy legislator, in which he similarly seeks to secure the greatest possible unity of the community in its composition, in its spiritual endeavours and its common aims.

This union is therefore the protecting rampart in which St Benedict wishes to enclose his monks, while they strive after virtue. Without lessening in the least the ideal of monachism, but rather displaying it in its full greatness, he desired to render its realisation possible in a secure way even by forcing

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it from the obedient with a holy constraint. Though his constitutional administration and disciplinary regulations may appear so comprehensible and human, they rest nevertheless on a wholly supernatural basis and are spiritualised by their constant relation to God.

Yet we must not overlook the fact that in his Prologue and last chapter, where he touches upon the first and third conversion, he addresses himself with delicate psychological feeling to the individual without, however, losing sight of the community in doing so.

But high above the bond which unites the monks to one another as "brethren," and to their abbot as their "father, teacher, physician and shepherd," in a family-like community, reaches the relation of the individual to God. If the monks are the abbot's "sons," "disciples," "the flock entrusted to him," they are at the same time God's "workmen, servants and soldiers." Their "labour," with its "products," as well as their "military service" belong, therefore, not to the head of the community, but to God alone, whose representative and administrator the abbot is. That is why the Saint characterises his institute as a "school of divine service," in the sense of the later Roman Empire, or as a military order for the service of God. The abbot is the commander-in-chief—the superior, whose office it is to preside, prescribe, command, order,

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regulate, coerce and correct, and in whose hands lie the ordering, the government and the discipline—"the Lord, however, whom they serve, the King whom they fight for," is God. The monastery in which the monk fulfils his vocation is "God's house." Here the true monastic community acquires its spiritual life and its consecration, while it passes into that supernatural assemblage of the Kingdom of God, embracing earth and heaven, whose Head and King is Christ.

This unitive principle, which dominates the entire Rule, reveals the greatness of the legislator. If Gregory the Great lays stress upon discretion as the special characteristic of the Rule, he takes care to point out the mildness that distinguishes St Benedict, as well as the independence with which he took his stand against the Oriental tradition.

But the particular importance of Benedict and his surpassing position in the general history of monasticism lies in the conscious clearness and power with which he was able to establish monachism on the basis of the Roman union of government, and yet preserve intact in all its purity, the highest ideal of union with God. The form in which he clothed his idea of a monk is not only an expression and an analogy copied from popular legislation: it is a fact full of real life. Its realisation is Western monasticism, with its far-reaching influence on religious and ecclesiastical life, and on the develop-

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ment of civilisation in the West during the Middle Ages.

The "service of the Lord," which the monastic community has to render, is essentially of an interior and spiritual kind. It manifests itself, however, to the outer world by two occupations, which fill up the whole life of the monastic family—namely, prayer and work. Both of these duties are so carefully regulated by appropriate statutes that the motto: "Ora et labora," has always been the guiding principle of Benedictine life.

Since intercourse with God in prayer forms the keynote of all monasticism, among cœnobites, living in monastic communities, the liturgy naturally became the form of prayer.

In the Church, as the Christian family of God, the established liturgy grouped itself around the Eucharistic Sacrifice. Prayer leads up to it, prayer streams out from it. It lifts up the soul of which it becomes the life, everything it touches, into a higher sphere and raises it to God. As a fountain of grace it penetrates and transfigures the earthly life of the Christian from baptism to the grave. That the life of the monk ought to be immersed in this "deifying light" belongs to the essence of his vocation, which is to strive after eternal transfiguration in the Kingdom of God apart from the world.

The liturgical legislation of St Benedict exhibits

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the same features as those which distinguish all the rest of his work. We find in it an ideal elevation of conception, coupled with a sympathetic grasp of the practical needs of the human soul, and a reverent acceptance of the labours of previous generations, without shrinking in the meantime from useful innovations. Thus in Matins he preserved the number of twelve Psalms, hallowed since the days of Pachomius, as an inheritance of early monasticism. The canticles of Lauds he borrowed from the liturgy of Rome, the hymns and plentiful use of the Alleluia from that of Milan. The singing of the Paternoster at Lauds and Vespers seems to be of Spanish origin (Council of Gerona in 517, can. 10). The doxology "Te decet laus" is certainly derived from the early age of the Greek Oriental Church, though, in the fifth century, it had already passed into Western liturgies. The liturgical prayer of compline is his own personal gift. Thus Benedict's "officium divinum"—or divine office—acquired a perfect completeness and a uniform consecrated seriousness, combined with joyful movement, and a contemplative repose united with varied expression of feeling.

The life of nature which was so familiar to primitive man, but which seemed to him so often to be governed by diabolical powers, has become in the liturgy a symbol of the life of the soul with God. First of all the ascending and descending light

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reflects a manifold mysticism of sin and grace, of death and resurrection in the prayerful soul. This symbolism of light exercised so strong an influence on the liturgy in its formative period precisely because for more than three hundred years the worship of the sun by the devotees of Mithras went on in the Roman Empire side by side with Christianity. To counteract this cultus of mysteries, which was widely propagated, particularly in the army, the Christians deliberately grouped their life of prayer around the Divine Redeemer as the triumphant sun of the world, "sol invictus"—the invincible sun.

During the night with its mysterious silence, and while the stars are shedding their heavenly light, St Benedict assembles his sons for the vigils of Matins. These are full of deep contemplation. The Psalms in profound and picturesque language sing of the highest verities which define the relations between God and man. When the soul grows tired, the lessons offer it new and refreshing nourishment. And as in the oldest form of ancient drama a choir responded to the narration of each individual, with a lyrical effusion of the sentiments which it had provoked in the audience, so after the lessons the responsories give forth the echo produced in the soul by the word of God. In measured and solemn melodies they express whatever thoughts of petition, thanksgiving, praise and admiration arise in the soul

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deeply moved by truth. Thus contemplation becomes a fact. In the third nocturn this note vibrates still more strongly; for the canticles raise it to the highest lyrical pitch. But once more the soul is directed to listen to divine doctrine by the reading of the Gospel and its explanation in the Homily. Then in the singing of the Te Deum it abandons itself fully to sentiments of joy, gratitude and jubilation, and this continues to a certain extent in the Lauds. A morning feeling fresh as dew haunts this hour of prayer. The fragrance of morning and the glory of Easter rest upon it. The sun rises above the horizon with his golden rays.

"Darkness and gloomy clouds of night,
Wild elements of earth and sky,
Depart—all heaven is flushed with light:
Christ comes—before His sunshine fly.

. . . . . .

Thee, Christ, alone we seek to know,
With pure and single minds adore,
Weeping and singing as we go;
Thy grace upon our senses pour."

Before the eyes of the monk, the risen Saviour, the Sun of eternity, is standing. All the joy of the redeemed community makes itself jubilantly felt in the strong and manly chant of the "Benedictus." The night is past: the "Orient from on high" has come "to enlighten them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death."

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But sunrise brings at the same time an invitation to put on the armour of light and go forth to the combat and heat of the day and of its labour. The little Hours which accompany the day in its course and refreshingly interrupt its work, are full of the thought of fatigue and suffering and conflict. Praise sets about the work of the day with tranquil confidence in the help of God.

> "Now that the day-star decks the sky
> We humbly pray to God on high,
> That He in all we do or say
> Would keep us safe from harm to-day."

With the Gradual Psalms (119-133)—the pilgrim songs of the Israelites on their way to Jerusalem—of which the little liturgical day offices are composed, Terce ascends higher. The Holy Ghost must fill our hearts and give them supernatural strength. This thought leads immediately to the sacrifice of the Blessed Eucharist, the noontide of the day. In it the monks are united to Christ by the divine Food of the Sacrifice and to one another by the holy kiss of peace. Thus spiritually elevated and fortified they say Sext in the warm midday hour, and thereby ask protection against weariness and against the adverse influences of demoniacal powers. None introduces us already to the solemn feelings of evening. The soul sees redemption at hand. "When the Lord brought back the captivity of Sion, we became like men comforted" (Ps. cxxv. 1). It sees

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the reapers gathering the harvest and enjoying the fruits of their labours. This feeling increases to a certainty of salvation in Vespers. Everything that Lauds promised is now fulfilled. Then the sun had risen and had given to the monks at prayer the assurance of the coming redemption. Now, when the sun in purple splendour sinks into the West, there arises all the more strongly in the soul a craving for the Sun of the spiritual world.

> "O ever-blessèd Trinity,
> Eternal Light and Unity,
> Now that the glowing sun departs
> Infuse Thy light into our hearts.
> To Thee our morning song of praise,
> To Thee our evening prayer we raise;
> Thy suppliants grant to chant on high
> Among the blest, eternally."

The monk becomes filled with the peace of God. He wishes to be incorporated into the Kingdom of Eternity, in order to gaze on the Light eternal. The Lord is near: the last hour has come. All these thoughts and desires ring out in the wonderful Magnificat. As in Lauds at sunrise, so now, when the light of day is departing, the abbot once more raises his voice in the solemn family prayer, the Our Father: "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us." In this way every discord among the brethren must cease, for the day should end in forgiveness, love and peace.

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But before night lays its dark shadows on the cloister walls St Benedict gathers his disciples yet again, for holy reading. The brethren who had yet to perform some necessary work should arrive in the meantime. The last noise of the day dies away, a peaceful stillness diffuses itself throughout the whole monastery. Then there arises in the basilica the slow and solemn chant of Compline. It asks for protection in the uneasy darkness. "Guard us, O Lord, as the apple of Thine eye: under the shadow of Thy wings protect us." After the fatigue and conflict and sorrow of the day the soul wishes to enter into the consolation of peace in the paternal heart of God. "In peace in the self-same I will sleep and I will rest" (Ps. iv. 9).

"Before the ending of the day,
Creator of the world, we pray
That of Thy loving mercy Thou
Wouldst be our Guard and Keeper now."

The last sounds melt away into the night under the silent brilliancy of the stars and the soul in like manner becomes silent in God.

Thus has the liturgy conducted the monk through all the grades of holy sensations. In an unconstrained and at the same time most artistic manner, his soul has been led to a clearer knowledge and a higher love of God. For even as the sun sheds its splendour on the world so, according to the intention of St Benedict, should the liturgical prayer light

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up the whole daily work of the monk and transform it into a real service of God, a " Servitium Dominicum." But if the Liturgy is the first and highest exercise of the community, a duty to which nothing should be preferred, labour should enter in to make a second claim upon its time, because " Idleness is an enemy of the soul." The soul of the monk sanctified through prayer must not grow weak through inactivity, but should rather grow strong and vigorous through earnest spiritual and corporal work.

As a preparation for the liturgy and springing from it, spiritual reading takes its place immediately after prayer. No less an authority than St Augustine in his *Christian Doctrine* has established a special training for clerics, replacing the educational purpose of rhetoric or philosophy during the later Roman period by the study of Holy Scripture. Scripture was spiritual reading. It arched the bridge from the formation of the cleric to the formation of the monk.

In a monastery where Gothic colonists were living together with Roman patricians, the idea of reading Holy Scripture had to be accepted in its widest sense: from the learning by heart of the Psalms, after the manner of scholars, to the profoundest study of the theologian. No doubt it was Benedict's intention that each one should devote himself to holy reading according to the measure of his

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powers. But whoever lacked the strength of mind or of will to apply himself with profit to the reading of, and meditating on, the sacred books, was to be occupied in other ways—even on Sundays—such was the precept which Cassiodorus in his *Introduction to sacred and profane reading* shares fundamentally with our lawgiver. The name of this last representative of the old Roman diplomacy is thus intimately linked to the history of monastic education and science: nor has the fact escaped those who have placed the refined senator in opposition to "that enemy of education," the father of monks of Monte Cassino. How unjust this is, may be learned from the circumstance that Benedict considered a writing-tablet and pen as indispensable for every monk, as clothing, shoes and stockings. He even feared an inclination to private proprietorship in his monks with regard to books and writing materials above all other things. To the boys, who are so often mentioned in the Rule, a more careful training was certainly given. And if in the appointing of an abbot the primary condition is that he "be learned in the law of God" and able to set before his disciples new things and old and to select the lessons for the liturgy and the reading for the table, and to direct the private studies of the brethren, then the monastic family should certainly number among its members such men as could answer to these cultured requirements. As the reader in the

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ancient Church was always a well-instructed man, so our Saint supposes the same to be the case with regard to those who read in public, either at the service of God or at table, and warns them not to be conceited or proud. Both master and scholar must accordingly have a high aim placed before them. A library offered them intellectual nourishment. Its existence alone postulates a writing-room in which books were made. In Lent spiritual reading was extended beyond its usual bounds. Then each brother had a book given him to peruse carefully from beginning to end. The hours for reading, which were not without difficulty and exertion, especially for beginners, were strictly superintended by the older brethren.

But Monte Cassino contained monks who possessed extended knowledge even of the profane sciences, such as the noble brothers Speciosus and Gregory, who were sent to found the monastery at Terracina (Dial., l. iv. c. viii.). More important, however, than the presence of learned individuals in the community, for the elevation of the general formation of the monks and for their influence on Christian culture, was the provision that all the brethren without exception had to familiarise themselves with books. If we bear in mind that in ancient times all reading was study, we will know how to estimate the merit of Benedict who gave so privileged a place in his Rule to holy reading. In a time of

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declining civilisation, that was possible only to one who knew from personal experience the immense value of mental labour. An examination of the sources reveals to us some, at least, of Benedict's diligent studies.

Besides the works of Cassian and Basil and the biography of the Father of Oriental monachism, which the Saint commended to his disciples, we find, in the Rule, evidence of letters, explanations of the Psalms, Sermons and the *City of God*, of St Augustine. We meet with the letters and Scripture Commentaries of St Jerome and the Homilies of St Leo the Great. Benedict has likewise drawn from the authors of Southern France. Not only were the works of Sulpicius Severus known to him, but he was acquainted with the writings of the monastic circle of Lerins, especially those of St Cæsarius of Arles. Allusions even to heathen authors, such as Sallust and Terence, are not wanting.

Without doubt it is only the least part of our Saint's profit from his studies that we detect in the quotations in his Rule. But the way in which he reproduces and transforms the passages thus absorbed, and the independence with which he works out what he has read, indicate the well-informed man. Hence he writes in the language of the educated man of his time, though out of consideration for his monks he does not despise the popular element either, without descending, however, to the tone of

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the vulgar speech. His Latin shows clearly the beginning of its transformation into Italian. If the Saint's words are plain, they are not wanting in beauty, stern realism, careful limiting and balancing; quiet outlook and exactness distinguish the mental labour of Benedict the lawgiver. His language breathes the same spirit. The word is always precise, clear and impressive. Transparency is the essence of Benedict's thoughts as well as of his words. An air of calm dignity, which is not lacking in commanding cadence, pervades all his expressions. The proposition is simply stated, but it is characteristic that it is not devoid of artistic form. The construction, popular in his time, of nicely calculated, rhythmical changes, and by contrasts responding to each other, never fails when the discourse is free to unfold itself. Benedict knew also how to divide his matter into well-defined chapters and to arrange these again into distinct groups taken from the reality of life. At the head of the chapter or in the course of it, the leading thought of the legislator is happily expressed in an axiomatic and significant way. The beauty of the whole is its perfect exactness and assurance, the typical language of Rome and especially of its laws. But to this is added in St Benedict a feature, which has often been remarked, namely, that the rigid frugality of his words is adorned with a tone of earnest, gentle and fatherly eloquence, which springs from the heart and reaches

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it. The language is a revelation of the spirit. It is thus a famous legislator and a spirit full of God that speaks to us in the legislative work of St Benedict.

If Benedict does not mention profane studies along with spiritual reading he certainly includes them in the intellectual work of the cloister in as far as they are postulated by the Scripture study. It is true he had too clear a view of the realities surrounding him to lay the same stress on science as his contemporary Cassiodorus. History has pronounced him to be right. The learned academy of Cassiodorus in Vivarium was swept completely away by the floods of the migration of the nations. Nothing remains of it but its Programme, while Benedict's spiritual reading became later, particularly on German soil, the guardian of ancient knowledge and the mother not only of theology but of the entire spiritual culture of the Middle Ages.

But the more the theological-ascetical character of spiritual reading shows it to be very intimately connected with prayer the more conspicuously does work in the particular sense of manual labour come into the foreground. This had its origin in the circumstances and conceptions of the age, but still more in the economic conditions of the monastic common life.

A mill, a garden and necessary workshops are to be established within the monastic walls. So Benedict has ordained to prevent the monks from rambling

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abroad. This arrangement, however, occasions a source of work as well for the hands that toil as for the administration. We may add that a remnant of documents studied in the light of modern research indicates that Monte Cassino had considerable possessions in Sicily, very probably in the time of St Benedict. This would naturally result in the management of extensive landed property, which would presuppose a considerable administrative force. But even the monastic husbandry on the Mount itself offered a large field for the expenditure of labour. The brothers themselves were active in the various industries. Thus damage done to working materials in the kitchen and cellar and bakery, as well as in the farmyard and the different workshops, is expressly mentioned in the Rule. The cultivation of the olive-yards and vineyards, the harvesting of the corn and the gathering and pressing of the grapes and olives, was the work of the monks. And we read in the life of St Benedict how he returns home at the head of the brethren from work in the fields (cap. xxxii.). Monks who had learned a trade were expected to place their ability modestly at the service of the monastery. If the produce of the house and farm exceeded the needs of the community, the surplus might be sold. Hence the work of the monks proves itself the basis of monastic poverty.

If the holy legislator wished to make his founda-

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tion independent of worldly influence he was obliged to establish it as an economic unity, which of itself supplied the monks with most of the necessaries of life. Labour, therefore, is not merely an ascetical exercise; it has a definite value of its own, and is productive of utilities. It procures for the monastery those goods which render it possible for each individual to observe perfect personal poverty. Poverty is the most important point of view in the economic theory of St Benedict. It determines his principles. One of the first economic principles says that one must buy at the lowest and sell at the highest price. Benedict, on the contrary, teaches indeed that for the clothing of the brethren they must buy what is least costly in the locality, but orders that the monastic produce should be sold at a somewhat lower price than could be done by people in the world. In the one case as in the other he wishes to guard poverty. Even the circumstance that the underbidding of secular workmen might mean a diminution of their industrial activity, is for him subordinated to the aim of hindering all greediness of gain on the part of his monks. If one considers that the Saint, whilst giving these orders, had before his eyes the circumstances of a monastic manor, whose tenants bought part of their livelihood from the convent estate, it is easy to understand that he did not wish any gain to be made from these customers. Perhaps the price he prescribes is only the net cost.

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He does not wish the trading of the monastery to be on the same lines as that of the neighbouring landowners.

To be free from all earthly possessions is for the monk one of the most essential duties, but work for the sustenance of the community, which makes personal poverty possible for the individual, is an ornament to him. He has the example of the Fathers and of the Apostles who lived by the work of their hands. This last thought certainly shows how fully our legislator is filled with the conception of monastic work contained in St Augustine's treatise *On the Labour of Monks*, which is quoted twice in the Holy Rule. The great Doctor of Hippo defends himself against the opinion that the good brethren who obey the apostolic precepts will be blamed by their idle and disobedient brothers as transgressors of the Gospel. From the teaching and example of the Apostles, manual work, which was despised in ancient times, received its nobility and consecration. In the cloister study and manual labour were, like prayer, regarded as an ethical means of self-education and of interior growth and sanctification. They were at the same time an expression of social feeling for the Church and the world. And as science sprang from the monastic spiritual reading, so from the cloistral manual labour the economical culture of the Middle Ages drew its richest fruits. The tradition of Roman cultivation

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of the soil and administration of property, the ability of the Roman workmen and the legacy of antique art were transmitted to the Germans through the medium of the monks.

Thus did St Benedict associate himself closely with the tradition of ancient monachism, yet he framed his Rule with creative freedom and independence, so that it is a juridical constitution deftly pieced together, in which the objective norm and the individual life are perfectly harmonised. The most idealistic form of spiritual life for an ecclesiastical community, namely liturgical worship, is united to the exertion of the natural powers in spiritual and corporal work. High as the monk may lift himself above all earthly things in the liturgical prayer, yet it is likewise a divine service for him if, in study and in manual labour, he is active in his surroundings and for them. This idea of the monastic vocation as a life of action the West owes to the lawgiver of Monte Cassino.

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All to All

ST BENEDICT was only a monk. This single direction of his whole being was the secret of his ripe and harmonious personality and, of what he never perhaps dreamt of, his success.

In the cave of Subiaco he was separated not only from the life of the world, but from the life of the Church. As soon, however, as he exchanged his hermitage for the cloister and became abbot of a monastic community, he was obliged to enter into manifold relations both with the Church and the world. This duty he did not in any way shirk.

As every high-minded man, who is full of noble ideals, has something of an Apostle in him, so had St Benedict. He, too, wished to give the best his life afforded and to draw from the surroundings in which he had built his house the spiritual gains which it might offer.

Over and above all there was the Church into whose full and living communion he and his first disciples had again entered under the guidance of the Liturgy. In the first fervour of his flight from the world he had become so much a stranger to it that even the Easter Alleluia no longer reached him.

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Now, however, Easter, the culminating point of the liturgical year, became a day ardently to be desired, one on which he united with his sons in the joy of the Holy Ghost. The entire Liturgy, with its holy seasons and days and hours, became for him a life in close communion with the sacred mysteries of Christ, and a union of every heart-beat with the pulse of the Church. Accordingly, to manifest his liturgical conformity with that of the Church, he prescribed that for the week-day Lauds the same canticles should be used as those which were sung at Rome. In the same way he laid down a rule for the liturgical lessons in perfect harmony with the spirit of the Church. The catalogues of approved and prohibited theological books, under the name of the *Decretum Gelasianum*, which appeared in the sixth century, not indeed in Rome, but in another Italian church, perhaps Aquileia or Pavia, as a learned but private work, was unknown to our Saint. But the general principles held by the above-named catalogue of writers, which were probably those also of the Roman Church, are his own. He orders that at the divine office those books only should be read whose authors are expressly named, not anonymous works, and that the authors should be numbered among the orthodox Catholic Fathers. Thus does Benedict securely lay the foundations of the life of faith, upon which the whole spiritual striving of the monks must rest.

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On similar considerations we may explain the rule that, at the end of the lessons, when the cantor intones the doxology: "Gloria Patri et Filio et Spiritui Sancto," the brethren should rise from their seats out of profound reverence towards the Holy Trinity. This liturgical homage was a confession of faith and at the same time a protest against the Arianism of the Ostrogoths and of the numerous Byzantines in Southern Italy.

This care for the preservation and strengthening of a vivid faith in the interior of the cloister urged the Saint to bring the Gospel of Christ everywhere to those that did not possess it. Already in the cave at Subiaco he had given the food of life in teaching and admonition to those who brought bodily nourishment to him, but in Monte Cassino he became the active Apostle and preacher to a still heathen environment. To the converted also he was always a kind pastor and he sent his monks to teach them. It seems that he gave special care to those who had dedicated their lives to God. The short instruction given in the *Vita* shows us that apostolic work for the salvation of souls was dear to the heart of the father of monks and to his disciples.

In his Rule he twice appeals to the authority of the Church for assistance. His monastic constitution and its regular discipline are so framed that the abbot alone can effectively deal with every trouble that may arise in the community. But if the monastery is

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deprived of its abbot, and if a part of the monks wish to choose an unworthy successor in his stead, then the bishop of the diocese, as well as the neighbouring abbots—and if these authorities do not act—the Christians that dwell around, must interfere and prevent the triumph of the wicked. Nothing can show better than this regulation how thoroughly St Benedict feels both himself and his monks to be at one with ecclesiastical unity, from the chief shepherd down to the last and least member of the Christian community.

There is still another instance indicative of Benedict's ecclesiastical way of thinking. If a monk, who is also a priest, does not yield obedience to the repeated admonitions of the abbot, the bishop is called in as a witness before his expulsion from the monastery takes place. Inasmuch as he is a priest, the bishop who laid ordaining hands on him or in whose diocese he lives, possesses certain fatherly rights over him, and even if the priest should not amend at the exhortation of the bishop, yet his lordship must bear witness to the correct procedure of the abbot. True, it is the abbot who enforces independently the rights of the cloister against the monastic priest, but as the latter, even when driven beyond the precincts of the cloister, still remains a priest, the bishop, who is now his superior, ought to have knowledge of the matter obtained by personal evidence.

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But not only was legal unity with the Church dear to the father of monks, he lived also in the thoughts and aims which agitated her in his day. An indication of this is his friendship with Germanus, Bishop of Capua, if the latter can be identified with that Germanus whom Pope Hormisdas sent in 519 to the Emperor Justin I at Constantinople, for the settlement of the Acacian schism.

In the darkness of night the abbot of Monte Cassino looked out of the window of his cell and saw a brilliant light and in it the whole world as in a single ray of the sun. In all this splendour, as in a fiery globe, the soul of Bishop Germanus of Capua was being borne by angels to heaven. The mysticism of antiquity had already taught that the spirit of the sage could, in the depths of night, by a sight of the starry heavens, be lifted into the upper ether, and from there observe as in a beatific vision the unity and beauty of the Cosmos. Since Plato, and especially among the mystics of Imperial times, the highest aim of the sage—the very fulfilment of his supreme desire—was to be vouchsafed such a vision of God and of the world. If Gregory the Great attributes to St Benedict this vision shortly before his death, it is to signify that he has attained the utmost height of perfection in this life. It is only after death that the soul can soar higher, like the soul of his bishop-friend, that, set free from the body, was ascending to heaven.

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Still another bishop was intimately united to Benedict in the bonds of friendship. This was Sabinus of Canosa in Apuleia, who became blind in extreme old age. Sabinus had once entertained as a guest Totila the King of the Goths, and with the amiable courtesy of an Italian had convinced the German, who was full of an artless curiosity for wonders, of his prophetic spirit. Accordingly, when the servant was in the act of offering wine to his episcopal master, the King took the goblet out of the servant's hand and conveyed it with his own to his blind host. Sabinus drank the wine with the words: "Blessed be that hand." Totila blushed for having doubted the prophetic gift of the blind bishop and now acknowledged it.

In his interview with St Benedict, when he surprised him on Monte Cassino, Sabinus turned the conversation upon the political events of the hour and the fate of the fatherland. To both men, the spiritual inheritors of the ancient Romans, it seemed certain that with either the freedom or the fall of Rome the fate of the world would be decided.

> "Rome must hold—the wide world's head—
> All beneath her sceptre dread."

Sabinus believed that with the successful entrance of Totila into Rome, on 17th December 546, the complete depopulation and destruction of the capital was to be expected. Not so Benedict: with him the city is and shall remain "Roma invicta"—the

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unconquerable. Not to the prowess of a foreign conqueror, but only to the powers dominated by the hand of God, storms, tempests and earthquakes, shall the mistress of the world gradually fall a victim, sinking under her own weight. It seems as if the Saint could only free himself with great interior resistance from the ancient idea of the eternity of the city of Rome—" æternitas urbis Romæ."

We also see St Benedict and his old friend succumb to the melancholy sentiment which, from the beginning of the migration of the peoples, had lain heavily on the representatives of the ancient world. For Rome, they anticipate nothing more than future ruin in one way or another. They build no great hopes upon the help of the Eastern Empire against the barbarians. " Mundus Romam perdidit "—the world has destroyed Rome—this word of St Ambrose seemed still more justified in the time of St Benedict. So certainly did the founder of Monte Cassino reckon with the ruin of existing conditions, that in a vision he even saw the destruction by the barbarians of the monastic buildings which he had erected with so much love.

His prophetic foresight did not deceive him. In the year 581 the Lombards came down upon his foundation, plundering it and dispersing the brethren.

We must realise the hapless renunciation of a political future for the old Roman state which

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Benedict shared with all his serious and thoughtful contemporaries, if we would estimate properly his meeting with the then chief of the German invasion on Italian soil.

Totila had conquered Naples and had regulated the situation in Southern Italy with a generosity and a forbearance that must have put to shame the cruelties of Belisarius, the Byzantine general. He was now marching with his Gothic hordes towards Rome. On his way he came through Campania to the foot of Monte Cassino. All around he heard the praises of the holiness of the abbot who lived there, and wished in his own way to convince himself of their genuineness. On the occasion of his visit to Sabinus at Canosa, we have already seen that Totila took special delight in putting to the proof men who were reputed to be possessed of extraordinary gifts of grace. This is easily explained. Soulless Arianism was not capable of offering to the German an idea of God, which enabled him to grasp Christianity in all its bearings. And yet there was nothing that made a more lasting impression on these simple and vigorous children of nature from the North than exterior evidences of divine power. The sight of a miracle, the revelation of supernatural knowledge, vanquished their souls and touched their hearts, and at the same time heightened their desire to see and hear still more of these great and wonderful things. This longing for the unusual in religious life was a distinctive feature of the

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remainder of Rome's declining days and may well be regarded as the root from which sprang the *Dialogues* of Gregory the Great.

Thus, then, Totila was not afraid to ascend Monte Cassino in order to make the acquaintance of the wonderful father of monks. The way in which he tried to prove the Saint was as naïve as it was unworthy of a King. His sword-bearer, Riggo, decked out in the royal purple and accompanied by the ordinary retinue of Totila, was to introduce himself to St Benedict as the King. This experiment to deceive the Saint succeeded badly. When still at a distance the abbot cried out to the approaching stranger: "Lay aside, my son, lay aside what thou bearest, it does not belong to you." Riggo fell to the ground through fear and dared not venture to draw nearer to the holy man, but returned with haste to his master, only to tell of his unmasking.

Profoundly touched, the King now set out on his way to St Benedict. He, too, was overpowered by the venerable appearance of the abbot. He threw himself at his feet and did not attempt to rise until the Saint lifted him up and said to him: "You are doing much evil and have already done many wicked things. Abandon at length your evil ways. Well! you are destined to enter Rome, you will cross over the sea. For nine years yet you will be King, but in the tenth you will die."

These prophetic words fell like a thunder-clap upon the ears of the Gothic King. He begged the Saint

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to remember him before God and then went forth to meet his fate. What Benedict said was fulfilled to the letter.

Four years after his visit to Monte Cassino Totila made his entry into Rome, but he soon relinquished the city to the Byzantine general Belisarius and proceeded towards the South. He re-entered it, however, once more, when Belisarius was recalled from his command in 549. On the generous leniency and forbearance with which he treated the Romans on both occasions St Gregory bestows the parsimonious praise that the King, since his meeting with St Benedict, had grown less cruel. Some three years later Totila stood amid the hazards of battle. As had been foretold to him, he passed over the sea, became a conqueror in Sicily, Sardinia and Corsica, and anchored his fleet even on the coast of Epirus. From these expeditions he returned to Rome in 552, to proceed against the newly appointed imperial general Narses. It was the tenth year which, according to the words of the abbot of Monte Cassino, was to bring about his end. At Tagina a bloody battle was fought. The Goths were compelled to give way, and Totila fell, wounded by the spear of a Gepiden. As night approached the heroic King died.

Taking a backward look at the meeting of the father of monks with the prince of the Goths, as it is related by St Gregory, it is evident that the description which he gives of the incident distinctly

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betrays national feeling. At that moment Benedict appears to him as a man of God raised above all human things and of a dignity superior to that of kings, while Totila is a cruel barbarian. The symbolism, which lay in the meeting, neither he nor the two who took part in it could possibly anticipate.

The kingship of the Germanic races was one day to lead to Roman imperialism and to protect the Church with the German sword, and Benedict's disciples were to be the teachers and leaders along this way to higher things. In the civilisation brought about by the Rule of St Benedict the Christian Middle Ages originated as far as Germany is concerned. Benedict, as well as Gregory the Great, was too full of regret over the inevitably approaching collapse of the old Roman world to perceive how much they themselves were contributing to prepare the Germans for their task of becoming the bearers of a new world.

Benedict may have complained of the foreign yoke of the Goths and may have seen in Totila only a barbarian and an Arian; nevertheless, there is room for a doubt as to the impartiality of the author of the *Dialogues* in this instance, as in several other passages of his four books, where he treats of Goths and Lombards.

The ideal of hospitality which Benedict sets before his monks in the Holy Rule does not seem to have been attained on this occasion, at all events in the narrative of St Gregory. And yet Gregory himself

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speaks of the Rule as a mirror in which the manner of Benedict's life is most accurately reflected, since "the holy man could not have taught otherwise than he lived." Now the governing principle of the Rule, with regard to the reception of guests, runs thus: "Let all guests that come be received like Christ Himself, because He will say on the last day: 'I was a stranger and you took Me in.' And let fitting honour be shown to all." And when the holy lawgiver continues: "especially to such as are of the household of the faith and to strangers," he certainly means to indicate that he does not want to except anyone from the honour due to his rank and station. Further on he writes: "Let them be saluted with all humility. At the arrival or departure of guests let Christ, who is received in them, be also adored in them by bowing the head or prostrating on the ground." As a matter of fact Benedict would not have been true to himself if he had caused Totila to feel his spiritual superiority in the measure that St Gregory would have us believe. Gregory wrote for Romans, and his literary style, which delights in contrasts, has led him more than once to exaggerate.

St Benedict himself was descended from Nursian Patricians or from Sabine landed nobility and had intimate relations with the noble circles of Rome, whose sons were numbered among his disciples. Family tradition and education had given respect for higher dignity in the course of his life, and experience had dictated to him the sentence:

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"The very fear men have of the rich procures them honour." Therefore the poor were nearest to his heart, "because in them Christ is more truly welcomed." In his monastery there is no difference of rank. "Whether bond or free, we are all one in Christ and bear an equal rank in the service of Our Lord: for with God there is no respecting of persons. Only for one reason are we preferred in His sight, that is, if we be found to surpass others in good works and in humility." Hence the Saint was greatly displeased when he came to hear that two noble ladies, who lived in the neighbourhood of Monte Cassino, as persons consecrated to God under his direction, had often in deprecatory terms wronged the man who, for love of God, took care of their worldly affairs. "Bridle your tongues," he said to them, "otherwise I shall exclude you from Holy Communion." After a short time both ladies died without having mended their ways and were buried in a church. As often, however, as the deacon at Holy Mass announced to the faithful: "Whoever does not receive Holy Communion will please depart," the nurse of the deceased ladies saw them rise out of their graves and leave the church. It was only when Benedict had the Holy Sacrifice offered for them, and thereby withdrew the excommunication, that they found rest in the grave.

This, his conception of nobility in a monastery, corresponded to his fundamental principle that all, whether noble or bondsman, should be equally poor.

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Even the children who were given over to the monastery by noble parents had at the offertory of the Mass to be disinherited before the altar, so that every prospect of future worldly greatness might be taken away from them. This disinheriting was no dishonour to them, but an elevation of their souls, because the poor are more perfect images of Christ our Redeemer, and they were Benedict's favourite friends. At the very gate of the monastery they were to be greeted with a "God bless you" and a "Thanks be to God." Hence they sought him in all their needs with confident assurance.

When the whole of Campania was visited by a grievous famine Benedict distributed all the bread and all the oil, even to the last little crust, which a subdeacon begged of him, to the poor. The reward of his love and of his trust in God did not fail. Flour was laid down at the cloister door by unseen hands; and at his prayer a vessel was miraculously filled with oil. Nor was it out of his abundance that Benedict gave. He could not help a peasant who asked him for twelve gold pieces, but he consoled him affectionately and invited him to return after two days. In the meantime he prayed for the poor man and on the third day found on the corn bin of the monastery thirteen pieces of gold. Twelve of these paid the debt of the distressed peasant, the remaining one relieved his pressing needs.

Another peasant was cruelly ill-treated by a Goth, named Zalla, who, as it appears, had to collect taxes.

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In his difficulty the peasant knew of no other resource than to assert untruthfully that he had given all his fortune into the keeping of the father of Monte Cassino. There and then the Goth bound him to his horse, and compelled him to go before and conduct him to this man. Benedict was seated at the gate of the monastery absorbed in a book, when the peasant came up and pointed him out to his tormentor, saying: "Look there, that is the Father Benedict of whom I spoke to you." Thereupon the man on horseback shouted aloud: "Get up, and go bring me the money of this peasant." The Saint raised his tranquil and thoughtful eyes from his reading and directed them towards the cords with which the poor supplicating peasant was bound. In an instant they fell from him to the ground. Seized with deadly terror, Zalla sprang from his horse, threw himself at the feet of the Saint and solicited his prayers. Benedict called some of the brethren, offered the Goth and, undoubtedly also the peasant, some refreshments and then admonished the former to restrain his hard and cruel nature.

Even when the piercing cry for help so inimitably peculiar to the Italian beggars bordered on importunity, the Saint never denied himself to the miserable. One day he was returning with his monks from labouring in the fields when a peasant encountered him in the way and cried: "Give me back my son, give me back my son." The abbot quietly asked: "Have I taken your son from you?"

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Then the poor man exclaimed: "My son is dead, come, bring him back to life." Then Benedict grew sad and said to the brethren: "Come, brothers, come, this is not our business, such miracles belong to the Blessed Apostles. Why will they lay burdens on us which we are unable to bear?" But the peasant declared with an oath that he would not go away until the man of God had restored his son to life. "Where is the dead child?" inquired St Benedict. "He lies at the door of the cloister," was the answer. When he arrived at the place the Saint knelt down and prayed with uplifted hands: "Lord, do not regard my sins, but look upon the faith of this man who implores Thee for the life of his child, and give back to this body the soul which Thou hast taken from it." He then took the child by the hand and restored him living to his father.

It was with a humility and a simplicity which recall the sublime simplicity of the Gospel that the father of monks of Monte Cassino worked his miracles in order to help the country people in the sufferings inseparable from their life and to enable them to turn their eyes upwards.

With a similar readiness to help, but with earnest demands, nay, with severity, he treated those who ought to be models in the Christian community. This we have seen already in his proceedings against the two noble ladies consecrated to God. Still more impressive is Gregory's story of the cleric from Aquino, who was tormented by an evil spirit.

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Benedict healed him by his prayer, but ordered him to abstain from the eating of flesh meat and never to receive a higher order. For a long time the cleric was faithful to the prescriptions of the Saint: but when he saw not only his contemporaries but even younger men promoted to higher orders and placed in higher positions, he could no longer endure his inferior ecclesiastical office and requested the bishop to confer on him the next order that was coming to him. Scarcely had he received it when he again fell under the power of the evil spirit and died a most miserable death.

Similar to this was the fate of a young monk who, through excessive love for his parents, left the monastery without the blessing of the abbot. Hardly had he reached the paternal home when death overtook him. Even in the grave he failed to find rest, till Benedict caused the Blessed Eucharist to be laid upon his breast and then interred him a second time. By this manner of communion after death, which was not altogether uncommon at that time, he was received once more into the liturgical communion of the brethren, which, by acting against his duty, he had forfeited. This brought him peace.

Thus the conduct of Benedict towards clerics and persons consecrated to God was inspired by a method of discipline which would strengthen the sense of responsibility for sacred duties once voluntarily undertaken.

All the relations of the Saint to the outer world, in

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so far as they are revealed in the *Life*, are characterised by high conceptions and a severe earnestness, coupled with an almost austere mildness. How consoling it is then to discover in his intercourse with his sister Scholastica such hidden treasures of the most tender affection.

Every year he met his sister, who was consecrated to God, at one of the monastic farms—for a single day. Once, and Scholastica's sensitive soul divined that it was to be their last opportunity—when the brother and sister had enjoyed their annual meeting and holy conversation, and when a modest repast had reunited themselves and their companions at sunset, the virgin besought her brother: "Do not leave me to-night, but let us converse till morning on the joys of heaven." She wanted it as a consolation for death. The Saint, however, surprised by such an unwonted request, so contrary to his monastic sense of duty, answered: "How can you speak thus, sister? To pass the night outside the monastery—that is quite impossible." Scholastica then turned to God in prayer, when suddenly there burst upon them a tempest of thunder and lightning, with wind and torrents of rain, which rendered it impossible for the abbot and his companions to put a foot beyond the threshold. Yet even this miracle which God had worked the austere brother wished to use as a mild reproof towards his sister. "God forgive you, sister, what have you done?" But she answered with childlike simplicity: "You see I

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asked you, and you would not consent, then I besought my Lord and He has heard me." And pleasantly joking she added: "Now set out and return to your monastery and leave me alone if you can." Scholastica's love had obtained from God that mighty colloquy with her devoted brother as her last earthly consolation. Three days after the brother and sister had departed from one another Benedict beheld the virginal soul of his beloved sister flying up to heaven in the form of a dove. Thankfulness and joy at her glorification filled his soul. He sent the brethren to bring her holy body to Monte Cassino and had her buried in the grave which he had prepared for himself. By the side of Scholastica he desired to rest at some future day.

In the characters of Benedict and Scholastica two epochs of Christian asceticism are distinctly reflected. The sister of the great father of monks still breathes fully the spirit of premonastic times in which virgins and widows consecrated themselves to God and either remained in their families or joined a small community under the direction of an elderly deaconess. They lived and worked in the Christian community; their instructor was the bishop, their standard of life the canons for virgins promulgated by councils and synods. The liturgical prayer of the Church was their spiritual school and the nourishment of their souls, and charity was their Rule. It was only when charity declined that the period of law began.

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As a representative of law and as a type of the monastic system and of cloistral asceticism regulated by Rule, St Benedict stands by the side of his virginal sister. Hence the desire inspired by delicate sisterly love to remain throughout the night with her brother, as well as Benedict's astonishment at such a request. Love and law stood in open opposition to each other. In his own discriminating way Gregory explains the issue of this pious contest brought about by divine interference. "She was more powerful with God," he says, "because she loved more." He likewise discovers the balance between the souls of the brother and sister. What might seem a lack of understanding between them was in reality only a difference in the development of external discipline. Their hearts were still united in the most intimate affection. So much so, says St Gregory the Great, that not even the grave could separate them, whose souls were ever united in God. And here the refined and manly tenderness of Benedict shines forth. The grave was to be the silent, yet eloquent witness, of his true brotherly love, just as the miraculous prayer of Scholastica revealed her affection. He wished to abide with his sister during the long night of the grave and await with her the everlasting morning of the Resurrection.

Wherever St Benedict comes in contact with the world around him he shows himself to be a man of high mind and deep feeling. He always sees the individual manifestations, whether of men or of

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events, on a background of the universal and the great, and therefore he also confronts them nobly and as a master. In St Gregory's *Life* this impression sometimes becomes so strong as to give the sense of imperiousness, severity and inexorability. This, however, lies chiefly in the manner of representing events, for the same narrator makes us feel clearly that humility and charity essentially distinguish the relations of our Saint with his fellow-men. Benedict sees and judges in a supernatural light in order to educate and elevate his surroundings to the supernatural. Whether he stands before Totila with prophetic admonition, or enters into amiable contention with Scholastica, he remains ever and absolutely the monk. This unity and decision of character formed the solid foundation of his sanctity.

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The Saint

THE late Roman hagiological literature which reached its culmination in the *Dialogues* of Gregory the Great, was concerned for the most part not with the enrichment of knowledge, but with the edification of souls. External events, particularly miraculous ones, afforded it the most welcome material. But as the elevation of the Christian to sanctity takes place in the depths of his innermost being, so for the knowledge and understanding of the inner life of the Patriarch of Monte Cassino the Rule must be our most important source, since it flowed from his very soul.

Natural talent is the groundwork of man's peculiar inner life and therefore also of his sanctity. Grace builds upon nature. Accordingly, if we wish to comprehend, first of all, the natural man in Benedict of Nursia, what we have hitherto said may afford sufficient data for an estimate of his character.

His understanding is keen and precise, practical and inclined to the things that lie nearest at hand—not speculative. Consecutiveness of thought is very characteristic of him. His outward course of life

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from Rome to Enfide, from Enfide to Subiaco, from there to Vicovaro and back again to his grotto, from the hermitage to the monastic colony and then from Subiaco to Monte Cassino, indicates his clear and sober way of thinking. The moment he sets about the constitution and monastic development of his cloister, he discloses a penetrating regard for Law. It is the one side of his monastic creation which most distinctly bears the impress of his personality. To it belongs the rich vocabulary of technical expressions in his Rule. To the eyes of all men, whether monks or seculars, he reveals a psychological insight, from which he derived his sound judgment and his superior pedagogy.

Along with this clear and penetrating intelligence went a strong will, conscious of its object. Resolute and aspiring, energetic and persevering, Benedict incorporated the "virtus" of the old Romans,—true manliness. His will was also invariably inclined to the right, and one might say that in him understanding and will were united to a strong, cultivated and upright mind—to integrity of character.

Self-control ruled his natural sensibility. The passion of anger makes itself most markedly felt. Gregory's *Life* relates several instances of its manifestation. The proud monk, who in his heart gave way to haughty and contemptuous thoughts about his abbot, Benedict reprimanded with vehemence. Another he sent away in anger

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and without a blessing, because he would not give over worrying him with the request for leave to visit his parents. And, again, during the famine in Campania, when, contrary to his express command, the last cruse of oil was denied to the poor sub-deacon Agapitus, and retained in the cloister, Benedict was indignant and ordered crust and oil to be thrown out of the window.

There may have been isolated occasions when the choleric temperament of the Saint gained the upper hand, but they are all the more important for us here, as they amply confirm what the attentive reader may observe in the Rule. The curt sentences, with their commanding sharpness, the many "ergos" at the end of a series of thoughts, the sequence of conjunctions, the frequency of particular adverbial phrases—"sine dubio, ante omnia, pro certo"—all reveal a lively energetic author, full of temper.

There is little imagination in Benedict, but it is quick and true. His Rule contains only few and lightly marked images—of original ones there are none. But when he reproduces the picture of the Good Shepherd he draws it in clear and impressive lines.

The father of monks was, then, not an artist by nature, if by artist we understand a soul gifted with a rich imagination and delicate sense of form. In the same way he could hardly be called a thinker, if by that term we mean a speculative philosopher.

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In reality, however, he possessed the essentials of both artist and philosopher. From the artist in him he derived that sense of spiritual beauty which, like a finely attuned harmony, pervades his whole work, and especially the solemn liturgical services arranged by him. A thinker, too, he undoubtedly was, from the view he took of the great and profound problems of life and the effort he made to solve them in his own sphere.

Benedict was by nature a clear-seeing and sensitive psychologist and this enabled him to become the successful teacher and legislator of an institution, whose aim was the elevation and perfection of the inner life of the soul.

But what gave to the natural powers of Benedict's soul, from his youth, a unique trend towards striving after perfection, was the mental ripeness which Gregory the Great, from the first chapter of his *Life*, remarks in him. "Even as a boy he showed the seriousness of an old man, so that in manners he was mature beyond his age." This is a pregnant characterisation of the Sabine temperament. Gregory has rediscovered this typical character of the Sabines in the *Life* of Benedict and has drawn from it a conclusion with regard to his youth. The gravity of manner and ripe maturity of the inhabitants of the Sabine hills, and that hardy nature of theirs, which the people of Rome were wont to praise as a Sabine inheritance, have found their best impersonation

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in the life of the Patriarch of Monte Cassino. Does not this conviction of St Gregory's give us an indication by which we can trace this psychological development of Benedict?

The fact is that even to our very critical eyes this austerity and maturity of manner are sufficiently apparent both in the life and the Rule. This spiritual ripeness led the young provincial from Rome to the solitude of the hermit. It was the fundamental principle of the three years at Subiaco. And the self-same element which, in old Rome, was designated "Sabine austerity," affords us the connecting link between the young hermit and the regenerator of monachism. It is significant that he immediately pointed out to the monks of Vicovaro the difference between his "manners"* and theirs; quite as significant is the vow of conversion of manners exacted by him, and the "mature character" he requires in the cellarer, as well as the concluding words of his Rule, which he tells us he has written in order that by its observance some degree of uprightness of "manners" may be evidenced. Hence his development from boyhood's years to the last chapter of the Rule points to one germ—Sabine austerity of "manners."

From this root of his natural endowments as well as from his spiritual gifts and the native soil in which they were planted grew Benedict's life of holiness.

* "Sitte," *i.e.* "manners" in the old English sense of moral character and right conduct. Cf. the "manners makyth man" of William of Wykeham.

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Nature had sketched the outlines in advance. These were filled in by the exterior events and interior experiences which we have been tracing. Their growth and perfection were the work of divine grace. The eye that searches scrutinisingly into the supernatural inner life of Benedict will never get completely to the bottom of it. One thing, however, it will see, and that is the peculiar richness of the soul of the Saint.

His whole spiritual life was sustained and penetrated by faith. This is quite self-evident in one who undertook a work which was born of faith and could only continue and be understood by faith. It is uplifting, nevertheless, to discover in the very text of the Rule the tranquil clearness, the deep sincerity and vigorous conviction of a faith, which had in it the full splendour of the ancient Church. The "militare Christo"—or fighting for Christ, is the index to his life. He recognises in himself in his dignity of abbot the representative of Christ. It is Christ he greets in his guests: he visits Him in the sick, and receives Him in the poor. The words of Tertullian: "If you have seen your brother, you have seen the Lord," St Benedict wished to see realised fully in the little Christian community of his monastic family. His sons were likewise to follow Christ in renunciation, to imitate Him in obedience, to dash in moments of temptation the evil suggestion at His feet, and to participate in His sufferings by patience. Nothing was to be preferred

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to the love of Christ. If we may speak at all of a Christo-centric view of life we may certainly apply the term to Benedict. Christ was for him the centre and the aim, the consolation and the power, the joy and the beauty of life. This living, all-pervading and dominating faith he wished to preserve intact in his disciples, and therefore he ordered that only the works of the approved orthodox Fathers should be read, a precaution which, at that time, in the midst of Arian, Monophysite, Pelagian and Origenistic troubles over questions of faith, was amply justified.

Persevering study had made Benedict familiar with the Holy Scriptures and a master in their application to life. They presented him among other things with the lofty points of view which distinguish his Rule. Every word he utters, from the thoughts of the Prologue that look out into eternity to the last practical prescription for daily guidance, is seen by him in the light of faith. But this light was also warmth both for heart and mind. Under the influence of supernatural power, what seemed hard and perhaps iron in the will of Benedict was softened, while the violent and hasty elements in him were restrained. The Rule, too, in its peculiar mingling of vigour and mildness, seems to reflect most vividly the interior workings of the soul of the Saint, which developed precisely in the domains of will and feeling.

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It is evident that the majestic bearing of the Patriarch, which Gregory's *Life* everywhere reveals, and which is very much like the old Roman trait of gravity—or dignified behaviour—dominated him; while a certain resignation to the decadence of the times, which was also observable in the abbot of Monte Cassino, contributed its share towards the mildness of his frame of mind. But it was the ancient monastic schooling that had exercised the profoundest influence on his strong nature. In the East he saw that this schooling put the chief stress on ἀπάθεια, freedom from the sway of passion, while in the West it laid more emphasis on patience, the self-sacrificing readiness for suffering. Benedict, however, though he probably shared with the old Romans an inclination to stoicism, whose ideal was ἀπάθεια, has expressly declared in the Prologue to his Rule that he draws his asceticism from that of the early Christians, which originated in the time of the martyrs, and whose keynote is: "By patience we have part in the sufferings of Christ."

From this element of mildness in the strong, energetic personality of Benedict comes that serious and tender disposition, which was the characteristic spirit of the ancient Christians of Rome. It is a greatness and depth of soul, which unite clarity of spirit with the freshness of a summer's day, in contrast to the Italian—a St Francis for instance—in whom there is more of a one-sided sensibility spring-

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ing from a warmth of sunny feelings, which is almost soft. In the early Christians, however, there was a ripeness of power strongly leavened by the "mildness of Christ," the strength of the Martyr united to the tenderness of the Virgin. This mentality of our Saint furnishes the explanation of that almost uneasy effort of his to find on all occasions the golden mean between the mildness of a father and the rigour of a master, between charity and discipline. Gregory the Great appreciated so strongly this peculiarity in the Rule, that he regards it as its chief characteristic, and so praises the Rule for its admirable discretion. And this is precisely what we may call the spirit of St Benedict, the one which gave to his soul its definite character—that harmonious equipoise of strength and tenderness, of law and liberty, of nature and grace, of objective rule and individual life, that union of Roman virtue and Christian charity. His whole being, therefore, breathes that peace in the ancient Christian sense, and that harmony of soul, which he holds up before his disciples as the one aim of life most worthy of being striven for, saying "Seek peace and pursue it."

This peace, which along with purity of heart and equanimity of soul gave its distinctive tone to the interior life of Benedict, was the fruit of a most profound faith and of a self-forgetting and self-sacrificing love, which are the characteristic hallmark of the Saints.

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The way which Benedict took to reach this summit of the spiritual life lies open before us in his monastic Rule. There we have the programme of a "school of divine service," which essays the task of avoiding vice and practising virtue. To this negative and positive striving after holiness essentially correspond the two chief means of sanctification, which Benedict placed in the hands of his disciples, after first testing them in his own case, namely monastic asceticism and the Liturgy of the Church.

When baptism signified not only the beginning of the life of grace in the soul of the convert, but generally also the enthusiastic giving of himself to Christ and His Gospel, with joyful admittance to the Church and to the fellowship of the Saints, the faithful devoted themselves absolutely to the positive striving after virtue. Sin, separation from God, and loss of their newly-found salvation seemed to them well-nigh inconceivable. To become more like Christ, to attain to Him, was the sole aim and desire of the soul that sought God. But when, upon the introduction of infant baptism, the great crisis in the individual life of Christians was abolished, and when with Constantine's edict of tolerance the infiltration of the lax spirit of the world into the Church damped the fervour of the Christian community, then attention was more keenly riveted than it had hitherto been on combating and avoiding sin. From this new tendency in the struggle for

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perfection, which was preponderatingly negative and defensive, originated a stronger accentuation of asceticism and its organisation in monasticism. Entrance into the monastic state became "conversion" (*conversio*) and was accompanied by gifts of grace, which made it a second baptism. By the side of this, however, the positive and enthusiastic pressing upwards and onwards of the Church of the Martyrs constantly asserted itself, though somewhat less earnestly from the commencement of the Middle Ages. In combining these two forms of spiritual effort Benedict is the spiritual heir of Augustine. "Diverte a malo et fac bonum." "Turn from evil and do good." With the great doctor of Hippo, who at the close of the first Christian era brings together the sum of the Church's doctrine and of the Church's life, the lawgiver of Monte Cassino, who offers to the West the mature product of ancient monachism rising anew out of the ruins of antiquity, likewise lays stress on the positive side of spiritual progress—"Fac bonum"—"Do good!"

As to our Saint himself, humility was the foundation of his entire moral endeavours in asceticism, just as the Liturgy formed the everflowing source of his inspiration and joy in God, which both found their union and their common spring of life in the love of Christ. In his estimate and development of these two means of sanctification, asceticism and the

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Liturgy, Benedict has brought about profound and far-reaching changes.

He began with the severest mortification of the sensual man. A cave served him for a house, a stone of the rock for a bed, while the spare leavings from the table of a monk sufficed him for nourishment. He was so separated from human comfort, that not only had he no companion in his striving, but even no superior. But from the hour when Providence led him forth from his solitude and gathered disciples around him, he recognised that "obedience is the first degree of humility, and that it becometh those who hold nothing dearer to them than Christ." Then his way to holiness took another direction. He regulated his whole life and that of his disciples by the single idea of a paternally governed monastic family. In it all things were in common and therefore the general standard of life had to be modified. There should be nothing in it either harsh or rigorous. The claims of nature were so arranged that the strong might find a joyful sufficiency and the weak have nothing to be alarmed at. This moderate rule is the law, the example of the abbot and of the older brethren, the pattern of the life of holiness. And with what large-heartedness Benedict cared for the monastic buildings and the household furniture, for the food and for the clothing, and with what charity he ordered that over and above the sufficiency generally allowed to all,

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there should be given to each what he particularly stood in need of. This order of life formed on the model of the first Christians in Jerusalem was entered upon by the hermit after two years at Subiaco, when he began to discover with increasing clearness that for a soul seeking God it was the surest way to sanctity. Not the killing of nature, but its progressive perfection, not the painful accumulation of exterior works, but the growing in the love of Christ is henceforth his ideal of holiness. He even represents this as the perfection of humility. "When the monk," he writes, "has ascended all the degrees of humility he will presently arrive at that perfect love of God which casteth out fear. By virtue of this love he will begin to keep, without labour, naturally and by force of habit, those precepts which he had formerly observed through fear; no longer now through dread of hell, but for the love of Christ, from the force of good custom and a delight in virtue. And this the Lord will vouchsafe to manifest by the Holy Spirit in His servant already cleansed from vices and sins." (Cap. vii.) How active and positive, how aspiring and joyful is this ideal of religious perfection! To it Benedict committed himself both at Monte Cassino and even outside his own monastic family. He heard of a hermit named Martin who lived in a cave on Monte Marsico, and had himself fastened with a long chain to a stone wall in order that he might not stray

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beyond the limits of his rocky habitation. Benedict at once sent one of his disciples to tell the hermit: "If you are a servant of God do not thus fetter yourself with a chain of iron, but with a chain of the love of Christ." His own experience had taught him what he so well expresses in the concluding words of the Prologue to his Rule: "As we go forward in our monastic life and in faith, we shall run in the way of God's commandments with enlarged hearts and unspeakable sweetness of love; so that never departing from His guidance, but persevering in His teaching in the Religious Life till death, we may share by patience in the sufferings of Christ and thereby deserve to be made partakers of His Kingdom."

His Rule seeks not to complete, but to begin: it does not treat of the final stages of the spiritual life, but aims at laying a solid foundation by the training it supplies in the earliest stages.

All elementary instruction must be plain and simple; but it contains within it the highest and final wisdom. The wise man alone, however, is competent to discern what is thus hidden, and hence the mysticism of the Rule does not lie upon the surface.

If mysticism be the union of the soul with God, through Christ, then we must acknowledge that Benedict's Rule truly serves the purpose of mystical teaching, and can only be understood when con-

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templated as a grand and all-comprehensive means to that end.

Redire ad Deum—" Return to God "—is the first sound to greet the ear of the listening disciple, as the motto of the monastic life. The novice-master must take note, above all things, as to whether his pupil really aspires to come to God; whether union with Him is the true aim of his thoughts and deeds, and he is not merely " seeking God " according to his own futile personal ideas and opinions.

The disciple is especially to look for God in the Liturgy (*Opus Dei*); in the common life of the cloister (*Obedientia*); and in the humiliation of Christ's suffering (*Opprobria*).

If obedience is practised in the spirit of the Rule, it is the shortest way for the novice to an intimate union of his own will with the Divine Will; to a heroic degree of faith. In every summons to action that comes to him through human lips, he will hear ever more clearly the Call of God; and whilst he appears outwardly to grow more dependent, and to be losing individuality, his inward strength is really increasing and working with a freedom inspired by God.

The monk should live as one constantly beneath the eye of God. This is the school of fear and reverence, through which he becomes purified from sin. For where no sin is, there is God; but there can be no sinlessness without Divine union. Purity of

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heart is itself perfect love, and the epitome and fulfilment of all virtue.

To have God ever-present in his thoughts, and the inspirer of all his practical resolves—to give God a dwelling-place in his heart as well as in his intellect —to realise that He alone is the Strength and Light of all our faculties, and that He blesses our knowledge and gives true freedom to our deeds—this is the very soul of humility, as set forth in the Rule.

Here we see distinctly how the passive and negative ways of purification are to the Saint merely the condition and safeguard of the positive and active striving upwards, so that progress on the way to the soul's union with Christ gains its most powerful furtherance in prayer and above all in the Liturgy.

With his entrance into the cœnobitic life Benedict definitely engrafted the social idea on the life of prayer. The praise of God in common with the whole Church, so sanctified of old, now became by day and night the language of prayer for the former hermit, who had been separated from all participation in the active fellowship of the Church. Thus his soul aspired to God out of the very heart of the Church, the bride of Christ and mother of all believers. The holy Feast of Easter, with its rays streaming through the liturgical year, became the fountain of light of his inner life. His monks awaited it with earnest preparation, with joy of the

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Holy Ghost. To the whole ancient Church each Sunday of the year was as it were the day of Christ's resurrection, of our own, and of the transfiguration of grace in holy baptism.

The German spirit of the Middle Ages, so full of profound sentiment, largely under the influence of the Crusades, walked lovingly through the Holy Land with the Son of Man, taking the Synoptic Gospels for its guide. The early Christians, on the other hand, stood with John in admiring adoration before the Son of God in His heavenly transfiguration. The joy of St Benedict was the Divine Child in the arms of His Virgin Mother, and he found his deepest devotion in meditating on the wounds of the Redeemer. And who does not know of the childlike exultation of the Poverello of Assisi, when he knelt in presence of the first Christmas crib in Greccio, and his ecstatic glow of love while receiving the stigmata on Mount Alverna.

Benedict lives in the spirit of the older Church, based on the noblest thoughts of the antique. In contemplation he rises far above all the sorrow of this world, and sees with ecstatic eyes the unity of all creation in God. His soul dwells in the glory of the transfiguration of the Risen One.

With the ascending ecclesiastical year he hastens onwards towards the great feast of Our Lord's resurrection, which renews and magnifies itself from day to day in the liturgical celebration, until

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at last it becomes to his soul an eternal consummation in the heavenly Kingdom of Christ. To him the Liturgy is not only a " following of Christ," which makes him trace hand in hand with the calendar of feasts the footsteps of the Saviour from His birth to His ascension; it is also an interior union in this life with Christ, Who lives on and triumphs in everlasting majesty.

This effect of the Liturgy, elevating and transfiguring the whole life of the soul, is for the most part produced sacramentally. This, of course, is the case in the strictest and most literal sense, with regard to the celebration of the Blessed Eucharist. But the prayer of the liturgical hours also partakes in a wider sense of this sacramental character. It is the prayer of the Church, the mystical body of Christ, and therefore in a true sense the prayer of Christ Himself, and as such produces effects of grace, throughout the entire Communion of the Saints, which far surpass all human efforts. And so each liturgical act is in itself a real communication of grace, something altogether beyond the interior, personal activity of those who take an official part in its celebration or belong as members to the liturgical community. This inflowing of divine grace from the liturgical service unites the soul with Christ and makes it more like Him in interior transfiguration. And so the liturgical life transforms Christians into " fellow-citizens with the saints and

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domestics of God," and fulfils those words of the Apostle of the Gentiles: "I live, now not I, but Christ liveth in me."

But to reach this consummation the subjective, interior personal effort of the soul must be constantly and closely united to the objective and quasi-sacramental action of the liturgical grace. The liturgical prayer of the community must be the personal prayer of each individual member of it. And this applies to personal prayer even outside of the liturgical service, to that personal prayer which has its own individual language, particularly when it expresses our individual wishes and needs.

For this prayer St Benedict, undoubtedly as the practical result of his own life of prayer, has bequeathed us a golden Rule: "If we desire," he writes, "to present a petition to men in power, we do not presume to do so without great humility and reverence. How much more then should we supplicate the Lord God with all humility and purity of devotion. And let us bear in mind that we shall not be heard for our much speaking, but for our purity of heart and compunction of tears. Prayer, therefore, ought to be short and pure, unless perhaps it be prolonged under the sensible inspiration of divine grace." And in another passage, when he speaks of the monastic oratory he says: "If any one wishes to pray silently by himself let him simply enter and

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pray, not in a loud voice, but with tears and fervour of heart."

Prayer gave Benedict's life its whole direction. His liturgical service of God he describes for us in his Rule, but his biography tells us also of his devotion in his cell. It has even preserved for us a prayer of the Saint, which we have already had occasion to mention in connection with the raising to life of the dead boy. "Lord, look not upon my sins, but upon the faith of this man, who begs that his child may be restored to life. Send back then to this body the soul which Thou hast taken from it." Humility, abandonment to the divine will, deep feeling and brevity characterise this prayer, and its form enables us to trace distinctly the influence of the liturgical style.

Each free hour of the active abbot was dedicated to prayer. In the stillness of the night his devotion passed more than once into a marvellous vision of light. His disciples and friends were accustomed to see him in tears during his prayer. This prayer of the soul steeped in recollection concentrates our attention upon one side of his sanctity, which, however, is rather its ornament and embellishment than its essence; that is, the supernatural gifts ("charismata") with which he was endowed.

Benedict read the hidden thoughts of his brethren's hearts: he knew the actions and omissions of his absent sons: he saw and foretold things

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to come: he exorcised evil spirits: he healed the sick and raised the dead to life. The exercise of these miraculous powers fills the narratives of Gregory's *Dialogues*. For us who try to draw a character sketch of the Saint, these wonderful stories are of less importance than the Rule, just as for a picture of the soul of St Paul his Epistles are more important than the Acts of the Apostles. This is all the more evident when we remember that the gift of miracles is neither the fruit of personal perfection nor is it bestowed by the Holy Ghost for the promotion of the recipient's sanctity, but for the advancement of others in the way of salvation. Its manifestation reveals not so much the interior union of the favoured soul with God as a purpose which it has to serve. The Abbot of Monte Cassino by means of his miracles confirmed his authority as the legislator of Western monasticism: they surrounded his name with a garland of glory and helped to further his work in the world.

The task which Providence had assigned to him was no small one. He was to adopt Oriental monachism to the character and spirit of the West, and to change Hellenistic mentality into Roman energy. Here we must retrace our steps somewhat.

The great problem of the reciprocal relations between the Orient and the Occident is one of the weightiest, not only in profane, but likewise in

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religious history. And St Benedict has his place in it.

Alexander the Great had, perhaps for the first time, intended a more intimate amalgamation of the East and the West, and this was partly attained under his successors. In connection with it, the characteristic traits of the Eastern and Western natures revealed themselves, as well as the mixed type resulting from their union.

To the West masculine qualities are especially attributable: the East is more remarkable for feminine virtues and proclivities. The Westerner is specially developed in intelligence and will, and gravitates towards rationalism and the organisation of masses of men, but likes to live by himself in strict, personal freedom. The Oriental exhibits more depth of soul, greater subserviency to association on a large scale, which often amounts to slavish sentimentality, and is abused by despotism. Such weakness is nevertheless combined with notable talents. In the domain of religion particularly, the East displays higher capacities than the West. Mysticism owns the Orient for its home. The Orient also gives man a higher power of dedication to the Divine, and ratifies more fully the cravings of the individual soul. The Oriental finds his highest level not in activity, but in tranquil immersion in the divine essence.

East and West are mutually dependent and they

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compensate each other. The Western is an organising spirit, a principle that gives form and figure, and with rigid criticism excludes everything exotic. The forces of the Orient are fruitful only when they are subjected to Western energy. On the other hand, Oriental religiousness, especially its mysticism, fertilises the Western spirit and gives to it largeness, repose, sentiment, depth and abandonment to the Godhead.

This mutual penetration operates more perfectly in Christendom than in the Hellenistic epoch of Alexander. Christianity unites, in an ideal way, the peculiar excellences both of the East and the West. Indeed, on its human and earthly side, it had to acquire those excellences. And so we see in the Church how East and West have again separated from one another and to some extent even are in conflict with each other.

The Western Church, however, acquired with admirable wisdom and discretion all the great and necessary advantages of the Eastern spirit, reduced them to form and consistency, ordered and modified them and then gave them to the Middle Ages and to the German race. The leaders in this movement were the great Latin fathers. The Orient withdrew from the West and from Roman organisation and then sank back into lethargy.

What the Western Church accomplished for the whole of Christendom that St Benedict has done for

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monasticism, without ever dreaming of the importance of his mission for the history of the world. Forced, through his own painful experiences, to the manifest necessity of renovating cloistral life, he impressed the Roman spirit on Oriental monachism and so made it accessible to the German people. His ideas with regard to the essential elements of monasticism are certainly not original, but what has made him the Patriarch of Western monks is the typical Western and Roman basis of his character.

He has transformed a few directions for a life of contemplation into a code of laws for an association bound by vocation to the service of God, with a patriarchal yet definitely limited constitution, a school of moral aims, a life of action. Through this engrafting of monasticism on concrete objects he has preserved to the West the great, deep, eternal thoughts of the Orient and made them instinct with life. In this consists the supreme importance of his work.

How did he accomplish this work? By living it himself out of the depths of his own being. His Rule is a compendium of his own life. As Gregory the Great has so strikingly expressed it: "This holy man could not have taught otherwise than he lived." The future of his creation, his enormous influence, and his blessed success he could not divine, even when he was preparing to go to his eternal home.

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A saintly death crowned his holy life. Six days before his departure he caused his grave to be opened in the Oratory of St John: it already contained the sacred remains of Scholastica. For almost a week the fever consumed him. On the day of his death he made them carry him to the church, there to receive, during the celebration of the Blessed Eucharist, the Body and Blood of the Redeemer as his viaticum. Standing erect, supported by his brethren, and with his hands extended towards heaven, after the manner of the Orantes in the Catacombs, Benedict breathed forth his soul to God with words of prayer upon his lips, still wet with the Blood of Christ. The transforming benediction of the Liturgy lay upon his death and conducted his soul along a brilliant path of light—as his disciples saw it—to its heavenly transfiguration above.

This is the figure of St Benedict as a Saint. A man who seeks God and dedicates himself entirely to His service: a man who opposes humility and obedience to the workings of his own will and directs himself and his life entirely according to the commandments of God: one whose whole being is steeped in the remembrance of God and in His service and love: one who is sincere, strong, temperate, dignified; and at the same time full of kindness, incessantly concerned for the twofold precept—the love of God and of his neighbour;

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one, in fine, who trains all those entrusted to his care in all their doings and on all occasions to advance more and more towards God. Thus does he manifest himself in his Rule: thus does his image flash upon us through the veil of Gregory's narrative: thus does he rise before our eyes still in these last days.

If we might, in connection with the history of the world, characterise St Benedict in a single phrase, we would say that "He was the last of the Romans." In the closing catastrophe of the Western Empire he not only embodied in rare purity the genuine Roman spirit; he was also one of the last to carry out the special mission appointed for the Roman intellect in the history of mankind. Rome was neither called upon nor able to enrich the world by dazzling contributions to art or learning: she was poor in imagination and in formative qualities, as Virgil had already declared:

"Others, I know, more tenderly may beat the sounding brass,
And better from the marble block bring living looks to pass;
Others may better plead the cause, may compass heaven's face,
And mark it out, and tell the stars:—their rising and their place:
But thou, O Roman! look to it the folks of earth to sway;
For this shall be thy handicraft, peace on the world to lay;
To spare the meek, but crush the proud by constant weight of War."

ÆNEID, Book vi. 847-853.

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What Rome had to give the world lay in the spheres of military discipline and political institutions: in short, in establishing the practical basis upon which the higher culture might be safely founded. Hence, it was the task of Rome to prepare the prosaic, uncultured West for receiving the rich, intellectual treasures of the Hellenistic East. On the broad stream of this Eastern thought came Christianity to the West; and the Western Church continued the work of Rome. True, she tried to absorb some of the burning ardour of Oriental faith; but her real grandeur lay, not in any speculative analysis of the new Teaching, but in the establishment of solid, working principles and of Ecclesiastical Institutions.

To St Benedict was allotted the office of Legislator for the Monastic Life. If it is a work of genius to enrich the world with new and profound thoughts, it is an equally valuable, if humbler, form of greatness to build up, out of the monumental fragments of traditional legislation, a firmly-knit household, where peaceful thoughts may safely dwell amid stormy surroundings. This St Benedict did for Western monasticism during the period of the German Folk-wandering. He stands between two worlds. The inheritance of that rich world, which came before him, he seizes upon and hands on to posterity, in a form that can be understood by the poorer centuries that followed.

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Old and New—East and West—it is a problem whose full greatness reveals itself once more in our own day to those who seek an outlet from the soulless, mechanical spirit of modern Western civilisation. It has already been solved by St Benedict. The stress he lays upon association; his love of the Liturgy; the importance that he assigns to humility and to the life of grace: these are acquisitions from the East. But his joy in building up and remaking; his firm hand in legislation; his rejection of mystical extravagance, with his love for seeing religious fervour take form in action: all these are of the West. To unite the two is once more the task of our day.

St Benedict points out to our Western mind the eternally unchangeable nature of the Divine, as the last end of all created beings, and teaches us at the same time how to build up the structure of Society here upon earth.

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Epilogue

MAY the essential traits in this picture of St Benedict, the strong, soul-transfiguring love of Christ, the grave, noble form of antiquity, and the deep feeling for the imperative needs of the time, remain the inalienable inheritance of his disciples in the era of the world that is now opening.

THE END

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